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*In Our
Town*

Alpine Masson



15/12/20





IN OUR TOWN





IN OUR TOWN

BY

ROSALINE MASSON

AUTHOR OF

'THE TRANSGRESSORS,' ETC.


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CHAPTER I

A CITIZEN OF OUR TOWN

4 FOR a typical old lawyer of Our Town give me my next-door neighbour, Christopher Fairbairn. He starts from his house regularly each morning at a quarter to ten o'clock, and I watch his thin, spare figure go obliquely across the street, and turn up the hill towards his chambers; and then I know it is time to start myself. I used often to wonder why, with his big house empty save for himself, he did not have his business-room under his own roof; but he is a man of habit. I myself, not being a rich Writer to the Signet, but only an idle member of Her Majesty's Bar, live in a cosy little 'main-door,' as we call it in Our Town. The top storeys of my house are entered by a 'common stair' round the corner; and, while I sit and smoke my

pipe in the evening, I can hear the patter of many feet above me, and be soothed by the strains of music on a cheap piano, and have all the joy of imagining myself a family man, without any further trouble or responsibility. But Christopher Fairbairn, on my other side, has a solemn old house of five storeys, built by his own father in the early days of the century; and in it he has lived, man and boy, all his life. I believe when he married he went to a neighbouring street for about a year, and then his father died and he inherited this house and came back to it. I remember once turning up some old directories of Our Town, in search of something, or to find some name, and being interested in seeing how many of the familiar names ran through them all, and where my friends' fathers and grandfathers had lived. Having the curiosity to look up my own street, I found number 44 inhabited by 'Angus Fairbairn, W.S.' So the house has never had tenant save of the same name and the same profession since first it was built among green fields, with its back windows looking on



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to country lanes, and nothing but dewy verdure, where the corn-crakes could be heard, and soft patches of woodland lying between it and the sunset on its western side, and far to the north the grey arm of the sea, dotted with islands and with sails. Now the back windows look on to lanes still, but they are stable-lanes; and the sun sets over chimneys, and is blurred and smoky; and one's neighbours' underlinen flaps in unblushing effrontery in every back-garden on the earlier days of the week; and on Saturday nights the monotonous sound of the beating of carpets rises from the stable haunts and defies interference.

When I first came to number 42 old Fairbairn lived alone, poor old chap. I used to think it must be terribly dreary for him, and would go round sometimes, uninvited, in the evening, for a smoke and a chat; feeling modestly confident that, however poor company I might be, I was at any rate better than dust and ghosts. But, though old Christopher is as gentle as a white owl, he is as formal and polite as a Quaker, and he has a trick of dropping

off into a fit of silent meditation, and then rousing himself with a shocked air at his own discourtesy; and this makes one feel rather a burden than a blessing. It was sad to see the kindly old man so deserted, cared for only by servants. His son, I must say, played the part of a cad; and yet, no doubt, there was something to be said on his side too; for a Scottish father, unsoftened by any wifely influence, rarely departs from discipline, rarely invites confidence. When first I heard that his English daughter-in-law was coming to live with Fairbairn, I wondered how it would work, for the only thing they had in common was that both their lives had been ruined by one selfish scamp. Old Fairbairn never mentions his son.

‘My daughter-in-law is going to make her home with me,’ was all he told me, nervously, one day, as we walked down the hill home together in the dusk; and, when I congratulated him on the pleasant change it would make in his house, he sighed.

‘I am so afraid she will think it dull,’ he said.

Poor old man! His son had never spared pains to let him know how dull it was!

‘A woman always finds things to do,’ I answered him cheerfully.

He took off his gold eye-glasses, and looked at me whimsically with his watery blue eyes.

‘You speak from vast experience, young sir,’ he observed dryly. Nevertheless, experience or no experience,—which is another story,—I knew I was right, and I repeated my theory.

‘She’ll refurnish the study, for one thing, sir,’ I told him, as he followed me into it.

‘Eh?’ He took his pipe from its case as he glanced round him in a terrified way.

His room is always called the ‘study,’ more from courtesy to its past than from description of its present, for, though the worn, leather-topped table, the original red of the leather quite white with fifty years of constant use, suggests that the room may once have merited its name, yet the big arm-chair, torn and scratched, with

sacking and horsehair bulging into view every here and there, speaks only of years of lonely reverie.

'If there were a woman in this house, sir,' I told him, 'the chair you sit in would have been covered long since with Liberty chintz.'

'Bless me! is that so?' he said, apologetically. Then he added gently, 'It is a quarter of a century since the little easy-chair opposite mine was taken out of the room, and since my wife used to complain of my papers collecting dust.'

I nodded, and knocked the ashes out of my pipe; but in my own mind I was saying, 'And it will be another quarter of a century before *my* wife complains of anything *I* do!'

'And do you think the chair will be re-covered now?' old Christopher asked.

'I'll tell you when I've had the pleasure of seeing your daughter-in-law,' I answered, being a lawyer.

'I have not seen her myself, yet,' he remarked thoughtfully. '—She was the daughter of an English rector,' he added,



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catching a passing expression on my face ;
'Dubois—Dubois his name was. He was
a rector in Sussex somewhere ; but her
people are all gone—all gone. I am glad
I am left.'

Well, it sounded incongruous, but respectable. I own I felt quite a woman's curiosity about the girl, and how she would drop into the old man's life. Moved by a passing impulse, I went to a florist's and sent some flowers to welcome her. After all, I was a next-door neighbour, and I never can see why we should let our Transatlantic brothers excel us in this graceful form of courtesy.

I have been told that, in Our Town, we have a contempt for the simpler courtesies. They say very unkind things about our dear dignified Town ; but she survives them, remaining as oblivious to criticism as her rock-built castle is to summer rains. And this oblivion is because Our Town, like the Castle, is in itself complete. Metaphorically speaking, it is a walled city, having within its walls all that it finds necessary for its existence. It has

its social life, its intellectual life, its religious life,—all within its own metaphorical walls. And so it happens that people may come to Our Town and make it their home for years, and take no hold of it, remaining in it and yet not of it.

Criticised as a picture, Our Town may be called lacking in colour: regarded as a photograph, it is the most beautiful city in the world. We all know that we live in the most beautiful city in the world. Strangers may jest or grumble, according to their natures and tempers, about our climate; but we can afford to smile. Who would be such a boor as to cavil at the most beautiful woman in the world because her temper was not equable?

I happened to be the only man at a large afternoon tea-gathering the other day, and I was trying to make myself inconspicuous in the doorway until some other man should arrive to bear me company, or until I could make good my escape. In this position I overheard the greetings and conversation of two ladies. They were both natives of Our Town, and knew each other intimately; but

the exigencies of marriage had torn one away for a few years. They sank down by one another on a sofa inside the doorway, and pressed each other's hands.

'It is a beautiful town, is it not?' asked she who had remained in it.

'It is indeed!' replied the other fervently. 'Coming back to Our Town after living elsewhere, one is struck afresh by it!'

'Ah, you will be!' answered the first sympathetically. 'Indeed, I never go out but I say to myself, "What a beautiful city it is we live in,—the Castle——"'

'And such broad streets!'

'And the public gardens!'

'And the magnificent buildings!'

'And the Old Town—so picturesque!'

'And the New Town—so regular!'

'Ah, it is a beautiful city!'

Do you, in other towns, say all this when you meet after a few years' separation, I wonder?

Our dear old Town! We boast that it, like Rome, is spread amid seven hills; but its grey old backbone lies jagged and worn along a single ridge from its Castle on the

height to its Palace in the depth ; and every vertebra of that ancient backbone is rich in crusted association and legend and tragedy and history. Our dear old Town, with its haze of blue-grey smoke hanging over it by day, and its hundreds of twinkling lights by night ! Cold and grey and hard and beautiful, it is like some exquisite pearl flung up on the shores of the misty sea.



CHAPTER II

ITS PHOTOGRAPH

IN that other metropolis in the south, the social view is like an Alpine vista—there is always a higher peak beyond. They rise, these peaks, growing whiter and more distant, till they mingle in the clouds; and the clouds themselves lie heaped and massed till the eye can scarcely distinguish which is Alp and which is sky. But in Our Town—our Royal Oak is sere. We are indeed ‘a royal and ancient city,’—so royal that we have palaces and strongholds of kings in our midst: so ancient that the palaces and strongholds are in ruins, and lie embedded in our slums. So in Our Town the social view is like a mirage of clouds and temples and towers; but we believe in it, and are content. We are a law unto ourselves. Now, ‘a man’s reach should exceed his

grasp, or what's a heaven for?'—and when it does not morally, we see moral disaster, and sophisticated standards of conduct: and when it does not mentally, there we have mental disaster, and the complacent smirk of the clever self-educated man who has never found his level: and when it does not socially, there is social disaster, for people lose sense of proportion, even as they do under democracies. Society becomes broken up into little cliques, with barriers so ill-defined and petty that the whole fabric is very like the human skin looked at under the microscope, with the cells tightly packed and pressing each other out of place, and the lower ones forsaking their sources of nourishment and fighting for a position on the surface.

But, if we have no Court, we likewise have no commerce—no smoky factories exist in our midst: we dismiss them all to our seaport. Stay—we have our industries, and they are characteristic,—we print and we brew; and from the mills in the valleys round Our Town the carts come laden with the heavy rolls of white paper for the

printers to blacken. Do you ever think, ye proud Southerners, how many of your books are made in Our Town?—and ah! how many of them are penned by the exiled Scot!

Yes, we live by our intellects. 'Our aristocracy is one of intellect,' is a sentence sometimes heard in Our Town. And then the phrase, 'A Member of Her Majesty's Bar,' brings with it the flavour of old days, when the members were all the sons of the old Scottish houses. And still we have representatives of these old houses among us, dear old names of Scottish worth, and we hear that So-and-So 'won't know So-and-So at home, you know'—though the professional contact is a daily one. Our dear Town! I hear it now! 'His mother was a So-and-So,' it says; and 'Who *was* she?' it asks. And I have heard a clever and lovable little lady allude lightly to 'my great-great-grandfather the statue,' waving her little aristocratic hand in its shabby kid glove towards the statue of the great statesman who gives the street its name.

Every one is related to every one else in

Our Town: this makes gossip a thing to be approached with caution, though rich in detail when arrived at. But in truth gossip is not rife, except among the idler and more inventive of my legal brethren, for Our Town is undisturbedly respectable. Respectability marks its every feature. The wide grey streets of stately grey houses are ossified essence of propriety. The east wind that whistles round the corners from where the far-off arm of the sea lies veiled in grey mist has nothing playful or wanton in its ways: it cuts like a knife. There is a story told that some one whose faith was active once tied up a shorn lamb to a lamp-post at a particularly exposed corner of Our Town. We are not told whether the lamb survived the breath of the east, or whether the faith survived the death of the lamb. The very windows of Our Town have the cold stare of conscious respectability—flat glass apertures evenly placed in grey stone dwellings. I have often thought, as I came down the hill from the Law Courts and faced my own street glaring at me through

the trees of the garden in front of it, that our windows are like many eyes, none of them with lashes to them. No white-painted jalousies, hot sun without and naughty, peeping, pretty faces within; no sunblind, scarlet-striped and festive; at the most a window-box with a few complacent plants of speckled laurels warranted to stand the cold. Our very statues are respectable. They also are grey. Many are local celebrities,—men who have lived in Our Town and supplied it with its proudest traditions and glories: men who have affected the history of their times. Some are equestrian; some hold open Bibles; others brandish scrolls. Down their stern visages the rain streams, and drips off their rugged features, and the brown city sparrow perches on the open Bible, or sits on the scroll and prunes its draggled plumage. But it is not always raining in Our Town: there are a great many days when it rains only at intervals. These are the days when the shop-people tell you it is 'soft,' and they say it with an air of mild congratulation. In summer we

often have a great many fair days, and every now and then a fine one; but then in summer every one has deserted Our Town, leaving the stolid houses locked and empty, and their blind eyes with brown paper covering them within.

Most of the life of Our Town goes on in winter. That we have chosen winter as the social season may perhaps be the root of the reason why our forms of sociability are sometimes accused of formality. They all have to be conducted within stone walls; and, moreover, the necessity of tearing oneself from one's own fireside on a sleety, windy night considerably detracts, unless one is very young, from the enjoyment of eating at somebody else's table. And may this not also be the reason why we never pursue pleasure for her own sweet sake in Our Town?—though that is ascribed to the strain of inherited Calvinism in our blood, making us take everything seriously, from our religion to our humour.

It is a strange fact, by the way, that our religion and our humour are closely allied, in that our national humour is so very

often directed at our clergy. I pointed it out to old Christopher Fairbairn the other day, *à propos* of a good story I brought him home from the Courts.

‘How do you account for it,’ I asked him, ‘that, in so strictly orthodox a nation, nine-tenths of the funny stories should begin with the words, “There was once a minister”?’ Is it the inherent comicality of the Cloth?’

‘No, no!’ he said hastily. ‘But perhaps their predominance may have something to do with it,’ he added, with a little twinkle.

And he was right. The Church militant here in earth takes up a very large space in the Scotsman’s cosmological outlook. In the days of the Middle Ages the Church was the centre of all light and learning. Nowadays, in Our Town, the man who has not been to the theatre all the week is roused to critical eagerness of intellect on Sunday, and the sermon provides him with his chief pleasure and pabulum. Long may it remain so; but oh!—give us an endowed theatre as well! When I see church after church erected at every corner, more than

half of them with never a patron saint to bless them,—churches for every possible creed—I have counted twenty-nine different denominations in our directory—I sometimes wish a millionaire would build and endow us a theatre, and fit it with gilded pillars and soft velvet cushions, and light it with electric light, and let the smell of saw-dust rise to the nostrils, and the tuning of the unseen orchestra strike the ear and thrill the nerves.

‘An endowed theatre?’ old Fairbairn said, when I told him of my amiable idea. ‘Dear, dear! what do you want with another theatre?’

‘I want to make it impossible for another Tennyson to spend his one night in Our Town at a hotel window, dubbing us to all eternity “The grey Metropolis of the North,” and giving us away about our misty summers and the “gloom that saddens heaven and earth.”’

‘There will never be another Tennyson ; so make your mind easy. And there will never be an endowed theatre either ; and, if there were, I fear it would only teach

the young people in Our Town to waste their time ;—although, if I remember rightly, Knox proposed the theatre as a means of education ; but I daresay the kind of plays he had in his mind was not that which would please a modern audience.'

And Fairbairn rose and put on his gold spectacles, and went to the bookshelf to verify his statement.

A 'means of education'—*education*—always education! The great stone University flung in our midst sends educational ripples to our extreme circumference. We seem to live now in order to be educated. We educate ourselves and each other all our lives long,—and we die without having been educated. I am weary of the word education.

'Were you fond of theatre-going, sir?' I asked Fairbairn, lazily watching him, and trusting that he would not find the volume ; or, finding it, would not read me a very copious extract.

'No, no—I was not addicted to it, I think. Oh, I daresay I was not averse from it. The theatre, in my day, stood on

the site of the General Post Office—a shabby-looking place it was, down a kind of earthy slope, and with news-shops in front of it. But it was there I saw Mackay in Bailie Nicol Jarvie; and it was there I saw Murray, Mrs. Siddons's brother—he was the lessee. I remember him distinctly—a melancholy, cultured man.'

'Then that theatre was the scene of all Mrs. Siddons's triumphs?'

In his interest in old reminiscences Fairbairn gave up his search for Knox's lighter moments, and returned to the fire.

'Yes, it was there Sir Walter Scott sat in a box on the night the first of the Waverley dramas was brought out, whilst yet the authorship of the novels was unacknowledged—but well guessed at,—oh, very well guessed at,—as was shown by the ovation he received. But that theatre was pulled down to make way for the Post Office. Lord Neaves wrote a farewell address, and they sang "God save the Queen," and the curtain went down for the last time.

'How changed Our Town is now from

what it was then! Changed in its ways of living, changed in its appearance. For so old a town, it is strange how much is new. You young people scarcely realise it. I don't believe that you, Gavin Seton, who think yourself a son of Our Town, and who are well versed in its history and all its traditions,—I don't believe that you, if you were to be put down in Our Town of sixty years ago, could find your way about.'

'I should dearly enjoy a day of such wandering, I know!' I answered him.

The old man smiled at me sympathetically. We were one in our love of Our Town. Then he smoked on in silence for a little.

'All our Scottish ways and thoughts will be strange to your daughter-in-law,' I said musingly.

He roused himself from his reverie, and looked troubled, passing his hand through his silver hair.

'Yes, doubtless it will be strange. But then, she is young, and young people can fall into new ways more easily than old ones can. I dislike change, myself.'

‘Well, she will find Our Town very different from what strangers must have found it early in the century,’ I said lightly. ‘For one thing, she will find two good theatres, with no earthy plots in front of them,—one at the far east, in the shadow of the Roman Catholic church,—always being burned down, and rising like a Phoenix from its ashes; and the other at the west, boldly elbowing the United Presbyterian Synod Hall!’

‘I think she will want rest,’ he answered gravely.

And, remembering the circumstances that had brought about her coming, I did not wonder; but I only said that Our Town was a good town to rest in.

‘It is good for most things,’ he answered me; ‘good for the health, and good for the intellect—when there is any.’

I looked up quickly, but Christopher Fairbairn is incapable of cynicism: and then we fell into silence. He, no doubt, was thinking of the old days when the oil lamps lit the earthy slope in front of the old theatre, and Scottish ladies kilted their

skirts as they stepped across the mud to see the play. And I also let my mind run into the past, though I am still young, if years are counted by briefs. I was born in Our Town, and our name is written in its annals for many years back. But they sent me to Harrow and to Cambridge, and I wandered about in other climates, all of which broke the spell a little. But now 'they' are all dead, and I am settled in Our Town, in a routine of Law Courts and clubs, dinners and balls, theories and thoughts. What next?

CHAPTER III

ITS HEART-BEATS

I MET Christopher Fairbairn the day after his daughter-in-law's arrival. He was looking quite happy and excited, and all his nervous abstraction was gone.

'You must come and call on Pansy,' he said, with an air of holding something in reserve.

'I will, with pleasure,' I answered heartily. 'She must be a good sort,' I added to myself; and I went without delay.

I was taken up the stairs, through the dim, vast house. I noticed, as I had never noticed before, the huge expanse of drab-coloured walls, terminating in the grey panes of the cupola—grey from the clouds above it. I noticed, as I had never noticed before, the shabby carpets, once so rich, now trodden into a pàtternless and thread-

bare state by the passing of many feet. I noticed, as I had never noticed before, the solid, ugly furniture on the landings,—the big cabinet with carved doors and brass locks; the inlaid chairs, with stamped velvet and worn silk stuffings; the dingy family portraits in dark corners; the yellow busts on marble pillars; the barometer, long past work.

Then the drawing-room door was opened and I was shown in. I had not been in this room for years, but I did not notice anything in it save the little figure that rose from the low chair by the fire to greet me.

Mrs. Fairbairn,—‘Mrs. John,’ as the old servant had called her,—proved to be a slight little thing in black, with no regular beauty and very little colour, save in her eyes; but possessing that indefinite charm that often wins so much where mere beauty fails. At first I felt a chill of disappointment, for I had pictured her different; but the chill lasted only till I met her eyes. They had a haunted look, reminding you with a shock that this little thing had not had an alto-

gether pleasant time of it. And then I heard her voice, as it thanked me for my flowers,—they were on the table by her,—and I could only smile vaguely, for I was trying to recall some lines about a voice. What were they?—a ‘low voice my soul hears, as a bird The fowler’s pipe, and follows to the snare.’ No, that won’t fit; she isn’t that kind. . . . I have it!—‘Your voice, when you wished the snowdrops back, Though it stay in my soul for ever!’

We were chatting quite pleasantly,—about modern novels, as far as I can remember,—when the door opened and old Christopher Fairbairn came in, carrying a wavering column of books, and steadying them by resting his chin on the top of the pile to prevent its overbalancing, which, as any one who has had to do with the transport of books knows, is the only way to carry them.

‘There, my dear!’ he said.

The middle of the column gave way, just as he reached a table, and all the books fell in a heap on it, and Christopher Fairbairn stood, flushed and triumphant, and nodded

a breathless welcome to me as his daughter-in-law and I came forward to help him.

‘What are they?’ she asked.

‘The Waverley Novels,’ he told her. ‘You mentioned, I think, last night, that it was some little time since you had read any of them. So I have brought them, Pansy, my dear. The foundations of Our Town are laid on the Waverley Novels.’

‘I hope they won’t lean to and tumble,’ she said, reflectively regarding the fallen volumes.

‘You had better begin with *The Heart of Midlothian*,’ he told her, ‘though I myself generally prefer to read them through chronologically, commencing with *Waverley*.’

‘Do you read them and re-read them?’ she inquired with wonder.

‘I read them through at least once every year,’ he replied, taking them up each in turn as he spoke, to find *The Heart of Midlothian*, and opening one or two lovingly at random as he did so.

His daughter-in-law watched him; and then she too took up one of the volumes

—and began to dust it with her handkerchief.

‘It is impossible to realise Our Town until you understand the influence of Scott,’ old Christopher went on, warming to his subject. ‘Our Town is the town of Scott—he pervades it. We think of Scott as we walk about our streets,—the streets he walked in, past the houses in which he lived. There are the Meadows, where he and his small comrades of George Square waged schoolboy warfare against the doughty little loons of Potterrow, or sallied forth to snowball the Town-guard. There is the house in which he was rich and prosperous and happy, where he entertained hospitably and wrote at leisure and at ease, and whence he drove in a high barouche to Abbotsford. Who passes it without glancing up at its rounded front? I think it was not there, it was in the house he moved into first after his losses, that poor genial Sir Walter came down the front steps, and threw his kindly word to the little maid-servant who was washing them,—“We’ll find a man for ye yet,

Betty!" And no doubt she went on wringing out her wet cloth with renewed zeal, for after all a husband is better than scrubbing door-steps. Every street is haunted by the well-known, well-loved figure; the grey pavements echo to his limping tread. Who passes that sharp turn at the head of the Mound without remembering that it was there that Scott stood and upbraided jesting Jeffrey, and turned his head aside and leant it on the wall, and wept over the spoiling of Scotland? It does not need the Scott Monument in Our Town to remind us of Scott—he lives in our hearts: he has made Scotland for us, and for all time. His tears have preserved what Jeffrey's whiggism demolished.'

Fairbairn took off his gold spectacles and rubbed them, and his voice faltered, for tradition was dear to him also.

'It is not only the man himself, his own immense personality, his power and strength, his appealing weaknesses,' he added, slowly, 'it is the people of his creation who haunt our streets, and are real living persons.'

When you go into the great picture-gallery at Holyrood, my dear, and stand looking down it, what scene will be before your eyes? What but the ball given to Prince Charlie in his short hour of triumph? And are not Flora Mac-Ivor and Rose Bradwardine there as well as the ill-starred Prince? We speak of Scott's characters as of real men and women.'

Christopher Fairbairn found *The Heart of Midlothian* at last, and handed it to his daughter-in-law.

'I must take you a drive round Arthur's Seat when you have read this,' he said, 'and then you will see David Deans's cottage, and the stone where Jeanie Deans met——'

'But they weren't—there wasn't any *real* Deans family, was there?'

'Well, any cabman will tell you there was,' I hastened to assure her, for old Christopher appeared mildly hurt by her question; 'and he will point out the cottage to you just as he will point you out John Knox's house or the Burns Monument. And, what is more, your cabby will stare

as much if you doubt the existence of the Deans family as if you asked if Sir Walter himself were not a myth.'

'And we all take pride—we all take pride—personal pride!' exclaimed Fairbairn. 'That matter of the cabman, now,—Seton is right. A cabman will drive you all about and tell you everything. When I have been taking tourists over the city I have noticed it. Let the cabman but get an inkling that it is a stranger seeing Our Town, and he will drive sitting half turned round on his box, and his whip busy pointing this way and that, and he will know it all better than I know it myself, and regard it with just pride as his own.'

'And the horse will go slowly, and stop at the right places—I believe the horses take a pride in Our Town too, Mrs. Fairbairn.'

But Christopher Fairbairn waved my levity aside. 'Oh, you must read the Waverleys, my dear,' he said, 'to get into the proper spirit. Yes, and Chambers's *Traditions*, and Lord Cockburn's *Memoirs*, and many others,—but the Waverleys first.

The modern town—you will enjoy that too, I hope, and make friends with the people. But the modern town is laid on the ghosts of the rich, romantic past. You must know all the traditions and associations, and then you will know what we come from, and where we root our pride, and whence we draw our inspirations. You must realise this, just as you must read your Malory before you read your Tennyson.'

The girl glanced at me; but I had taken up one of the books, and was turning it over, standing a little way off from them on the hearthrug, so as not to interfere with Mrs. John's education.

Seeing me thus absorbed, she took one of old Christopher's hands and kissed it, and he raised it to her head, and stroked back her hair.

'You are the spirit of it all yourself, you dear, gentle, chivalrous kinsman,' I heard her tell him, in a quick whisper; 'you have every spark of it in your dear Scotch blue eyes behind your gold eye-glasses—Saint Andrew!'

Ivanhoe was always *my* favourite,' I remarked, coming forward, for I felt a bit of an eavesdropper.

When I said good-bye the old man came downstairs with me.

'I feel as I did when, as a boy, I had imprisoned a lark in a cage,' he said to me at the door.

'You must have been an extraordinarily tender-hearted little chap, sir,' I answered. 'I never had the luck to catch a lark! But I remember once finding a poor little frightened canary on the window-sill,' I added, reflectively, 'that had escaped from some neighbour's cage; and it came in and got a warm and food.'

'And what happened to it?' he asked, almost eagerly.

'Oh, it was claimed.'

'Ah!'

Something in his tone struck a responsive note in me. I felt very angry without knowing the exact reason; and I stood lingering on the doorstep without any ostensible reason either.

'Poor lassie—poor lassie!' said Chris-

topher Fairbairn, looking at the trees in the gardens opposite his house.

And still I waited.

‘It’s a quaint name she is called by,—“Pansy”,’ he said soon, in a different voice. ‘Did you ever hear “Pansy” as a woman’s name before, Seton,—you who have so much knowledge of all that concerns the sex?’

‘“Pansies, that’s for thoughts,”’ I quoted lightly.

But, as I turned to go, I saw that Christopher Fairbairn’s face had grown sad again.

CHAPTER IV

A STRANGER WITHIN ITS GATES

I SOMEHOW got into the way of dropping in pretty frequently next door on my way home from the Courts. It was pleasant to see the lamp gleaming faintly through the curtains upstairs, and the flicker of firelight on the window, and know a graceful little hostess was sitting quietly there, ready to be talked to. She very soon added some touches to the drawing-room to make it home-like—flowers, and a few books and magazines with a big paper-knife on a little table at her side. Then one day she called upon me to admire a piano—a little ‘boudoir grand’, she called it—that old Fairbairn had hired for her. ‘If I like it, he wants to buy it for me,’ she said, stand-

ing by it and playing a few idle chords with one hand. Everything she did had a soothing gracefulness about it,—something that charmed the eye without tiring it.

Old Christopher Fairbairn came in late from his office, and made me stay to dinner. 'You must hear the new piano,' he said gleefully. 'Seton counts himself quite a judge,' he told his daughter-in-law. So I stayed, and she sang and played to us, and it was very pleasant.

'Come again—come often!' he said genially, as he saw me out. 'It is dull for her with only an old man like me; and I know so few young people in Our Town. I am always remembering some eager young lad or fair lassie, and then discovering that he is a grandfather, and she——' he paused, chivalrously.

'Mrs. Fairbairn will soon make many friends,' I said.

'I hope so—I hope so.'

Next time I went I found Mrs. Fairbairn standing in the middle of the room, with her hands behind her, and her eyes anxiously regarding about a dozen pictures—three of

the biggest propped up against the wall, two sitting on arm-chairs, and a few small ones lying on the piano.

I am rather fond of pictures, and some of these were clever. 'That's an exquisite little piece. By Jove, what a sky!' I told her. 'Where will you get a good light for it?'

So it ended in my unknottting some of the cords to which, for years, hideous oil monstrosities had been suspended, and re-knottting them round the rings at the back of her little water-colours. And then she laughed ruefully to see the discoloured walls with the fresh patches where the old pictures had been taken down.

When old Christopher Fairbairn came in, he put on his eyeglasses and examined each picture carefully. She had not vouchsafed me any information about them, save the names of the artists; but, as old Fairbairn went from picture to picture, she hovered behind him, and said softly, 'That used to be in the drawing-room at home. Father bought it, because he thought it was like Fairmeadow; then I had it.' And

again, 'That was never at home: *I* had that. It was a present to me.'

I gradually conned the fact that 'home' was the paternal rectory, and 'I had it' referred to what came after.

Old Fairbairn asked no questions, and made no comments on what she said. 'A bonny bit,' he would remark, or, 'That's a grand oak!' He was not much of an art critic. Then he went to the piano and took up two miniatures.

'My mother's parents,' said Pansy.

'He looks a gallant lad in his pink coat,' said old Fairbairn; 'and there's a touch of you in your grandmother, my dear,—just a touch.'

He put the portraits gently on the mantelpiece. As he did so, he could not fail to see the wonderful patches above it where we had taken down two big classical prints and hung two small landscapes.

'You will have to get a fresh paper for this room, my dear. This one has been hung for twenty-five years.'

'We'll think of that, Saint Andrew,'

she answered. 'Perhaps some day, when you are away. I like to live into a room first, and see what is needed.'

And her 'Saint Andrew,' as she called him, smiled as if well pleased. Was it only at the postponement of the introduction of the British workman, or was it at what her words suggested?

So it happened that the incongruous pictures remained, not a whit more incongruous than their little owner. And somehow the room began to assume a very pleasant aspect, with all the stiff, uncomfortable chairs pushed back into far-off alcoves and corners, and three or four cosy ones pulled round the fire, and the little low tea-table on the hearth, with the firelight playing on the glossy, old-fashioned family silver, and books lying about, and the piano open and littered with music, and the sampler in the tarnished gilt frame gracefully hidden by a big pot of flowers set against it.

'What about that sacrilege you prophesied regarding my study, Seton?' old Fairbairn asked me as he took me down.

for a smoke. 'She has not yet disturbed a thing, see! And you yourself heard what she said about the drawing-room.' He rubbed his hands gleefully.

'Ah, give her time, sir.'

He unscrewed his pipe and looked into it reflectively.

'It must seem a dull house to her,' he said, soberly. 'Since my wife left me it has not been touched. The room—the room she had—to the last—it is now what my servants call "the best bedroom," and they seemed to think it should be prepared for my daughter-in-law; but—well, I preferred to let it stand. I took Pansy into it a day or two after she came, to ask her if she would like it; but her expression as she looked round it—she did not know its history—revealed to me that it was a cheerless room to her mind.' He smiled a little quiet smile of half-humorous sadness. 'There is a four-poster bed with dark red hangings and black fringe, the same as the window-curtains; it was thought the handsome thing in that day. And—well, I saw it all with Pansy's eyes as she looked

round. Ah, Seton, Seton!—if old folk could sometimes see with young folks' eyes!'

'Perhaps that will come, sir, when young folk act on old folks' experience, instead of gleaning their own with travail and grief.'

'Whoever gains experience at any price short of ruin may count himself a fortunate man,' answered Christopher Fairbairn. It was a favourite saying of his.

I made no answer. I was thinking how many people had not stopped short of ruin, and yet had counted themselves blest.

Old Fairbairn filled his pipe slowly, and reached out his hand for a match. "'Truly the old order changeth, giving place to new,'" he said, as I got up to supply him. 'When I was a boy we burned wax candles in silver sconces, and the stairs were but half lit with smoky oil lamps. Now, I burn gas. But my neighbours are putting in electric light, and urging me to do so.'

I smoked my cigar in silence. The thought rose in my mind that he had a new light in his house better than any

his neighbour could boast ; but I let that thought stay in its birthplace.

‘You must remember many things that the wax candles shone on and the electric light will never show,’ I suggested.

‘Ay,’ he said dreamily, ‘I can remember being told by my mother that she and my father were going to visit the king in his palace. That must have been when George the Fourth was in Our Town. And again I can remember being rolled in a blanket in the middle of the night, as it seemed to me, and carried by the servants to the top windows to see a vast glow in the southern sky. That was the “great fires,” when Parliament Close was burned down.’

‘And rose again as Parliament Square. That was in 1824, wasn’t it? Did you ever meet Scott?’

A disturbed look passed over the old man’s features. ‘My father knew him,—officially,’ he said evasively. ‘He sat with him on the provisional committee for the Academy school. Ay, and he was at the dinner when Scott announced the authorship of the Waverleys, and every one present

was mad with excitement and enthusiasm, and Scott sent down the table the note to fat Peter Robertson,—“Confess something too. Why not the Begbie murder?”—My father was at that dinner!’

‘But you yourself—do you remember Scott?’ I persisted.

Again the troubled look on the old man’s face.

‘I must have seen him,’ he said, slowly, reluctantly; ‘I must have been in the same room with him, I know that for certain. But—man!—I cannot mind!’

He lifted his head and stared at me as if scared at the magnitude of the wrong done him by his memory.

‘That you have been in the same room with Scott!’ I said, looking at him; ‘it seems to me wonderful!—

“Ah, did you once see Shelley plain,
And did he stop and speak to you?
And did you ——”

I stopped: the quotation was singularly inappropriate, for had not Fairbairn remembered ‘the rest,’ and forgotten just that? Yes, it was hard.

‘Even to be with a man who can say it—’ I continued; but he broke in with a harsh voice quite unlike his usual one.

‘Ay, who can say “I have been in the same room with Walter Scott, and I can mind this, and I can mind that, but I cannot mind *him!*”’

The old man knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and replaced it with trembling fingers in its case.

I suppressed an inclination to smile, for I saw I was in the presence of a very real woe.

‘Tell me more of what you *do* remember, sir,’ I said.

‘I remember many things. Pansy has been making me grow garrulous, and now you are encouraging me. I can remember old Lord Glenlee—he seemed to me such an old man then; but that is over fifty years ago—he must have been just the age I am now. He was the last of our judges who wore his judicial wig in the street, and he made a picturesque figure going about in it and his long cravat, his silk stockings and silver buckles, and his

cocked hat in his hand. Ay, and he rode in a sedan chair, too, to heighten the effect. He was a link with the past;—but it was just about the same time, a year or two years later, perhaps, not more,—that I was walking one spring day along George Street, and met the procession of Scottish ministers and elders leaving their Church——’

‘The Disruption?’

‘The Disruption. And I took a “mini-bus” and followed them, down to Canonmills, through the mass of cheering people and waving handkerchiefs,—just filled with boyish curiosity to see what might happen.’

‘But your interest did not carry you further than Canonmills, sir? I mean, you were one of those who remained in the Church?’

‘My father was a Tory, a Church and State man, and his health was beginning at that time to fail him. I never crossed him,’ old Fairbairn answered simply, as though stating a fact. ‘I never told him about the minibus, even,’ he added, with a sly smile. ‘I was explaining to Pansy

about the Disruption,' he continued, the smile deepening. 'It is all very new to her, of course. It is strange how ignorant the English are in all that concerns Scotland. Pansy here—it is not her fault, she has never been taught—she asked if the Free Church were regarded the same as "Dissent" is in England, and said that her father had had a good deal of trouble with Dissent in his parish! But she is taking kindly to Our Town, I think. With me it is all the past, but I would like her to make friends with the present too. I daresay she shuns——' He stopped; and presently he murmured, as he had murmured the first day I met her, 'Poor lassie—poor lassie!'

'Do you know Mrs. Fairbairn well?' an old lady to whom I was talking a day or two later asked me.

'As well as one *can* know one's next-door neighbour,' I answered ambiguously.

The lady inferred, as I had meant she should infer, that the acquaintance I enjoyed was a very slight one.

'One never does seem to know her well,' she answered consolingly, but in a fretful

tone. 'I called, and she returned the call, and she and her father-in-law dined with us. I like her—do you like her?'

'Very much.'

But my laconic replies in no way deterred her.

'Yes,—I like her,' she said, nodding her head. 'But there is something elusive—beyond one's grasp.'

'And yet worth the grasping?' I hazarded.

But the train of thought was different from mine.

'Who *was* she?' came the familiar query, in a lowered voice.

'I believe that her maiden name was Dubois: a Huguenot name, I fancy, isn't it? Her father was a rector in Sussex, I have been told.'

'Ah! and is she an orphan? Has she no people left?'

'That I have never asked her.'

'Poor thing! It is a sad story. One never knows the ins and outs of a story like that. No doubt it accounts for much in her manner.'

'I fancy manner is often influenced by experience,' I agreed.

Yes, I think Fairbairn is right; his daughter-in-law shuns the present, and mingles in it only because it pleases him for her to do so. Who can wonder? But she makes friends; and she wins liking without effort, and seems grateful for it when it is won. Our Town is gingerly in its advances; but it is calling on Mrs. Fairbairn. Often, now that she has been here—how long is it?—I see a carriage driving slowly up and down in front of the door, and so have to go sulkily up my own steps instead of my neighbours'. Or, seeing no such warning outside, I am shown in, only to find Mrs. Fairbairn conversing with two or three ladies; and I have to solace myself with the faint amusement of seeing them thaw slightly with the discovery that they and their hostess have an acquaintance in common,—and that an inhabitant, moreover, of Our Town.



CHAPTER V

MAINLY ABOUT SENTIMENT

CHRISTOPHER FAIRBAIRN, as might have been expected, is an elder of his church. I believe he sat, as a small boy, between his father and mother in that same church. I don't fancy he has ever been to any other; but that is not the outcome of religious intolerance—it is merely force of habit. Old Christopher is the most tolerant of men; and, what usually goes with the better forms of tolerance, he is greatly gifted with reverence,—reverence not only for a single Divinity, but for the divine which is in each human soul. The only contribution I ever heard him make to the scandal of the club smoking-room was when he took his cigar out of his mouth in the thick of one of Blake's tales, and observed, in a tone of sad

apology, that it takes all kinds to make a world. However, when gossip waxes very hilarious, I notice old Fairbairn always grows dreamy and absent.

‘It is as bad as having a lady present—he stops conversation!’ a man grumbled to me once.

‘Yes,—he acts like a sense of truth,’ I assented.

But when I abused some scandal-monger to Fairbairn afterwards the kindly old man looked quite troubled at my boldly expressed dislike.

‘Blake? Oh, let the poor fellow be—let him be. There’s no real harm in him,’ he said. ‘There’s never any real harm in anybody.’

‘Well, but, sir, that story about——’

‘Ah, yes, he ought not to say that; and he will learn not to say these things. Don’t you go and repeat it, Seton!’ he added, anxiously.

And I felt suddenly rather pulled up, for I daresay I may have repeated it, if only as an example of Blake’s scurrility.

But when the conversation at the club

turns to men and manners, to books and beliefs, to great arts and good philosophies, to far-off unhappy things, to anything of worth, to anything outside the radius of practical politics,—then Christopher Fairbairn's pure old face thrusts itself forward, and his blue eyes fill with life. He is not a great talker—there are other men among us who do the brilliant talking, who are expected to do the brilliant talking;—but old Fairbairn passes his scholarly hand, with its cluster of thick, knotted blue veins, through his spare silver hair, till it rises in a rumpled aureole; and, when he does speak, putting in a fact modestly, as if apologising for his knowledge, or venturing an opinion in the polite form of interrogation, then his facts often give proof of out-of-the-way learning, and his opinion often disentangles the sudden truth from the mazed confusion of theory.

But now it is in his own home, by the fire, with the gentle persuasion toward peace that Pansy's mere presence infuses, that old Christopher comes out best. Then, warming his hands by the blaze, with Pansy

sitting back from the firelight, and whilst I am watching for the moment when she may drop her fire-screen and let the flame reveal her expression—then he talks, slowly, tentatively at first, as if unaccustomed, and gradually with increasing ease. It seems to me that now, after years of lonely cogitation, he utters aloud to this little womanly companion thoughts that have been his only company for years. And Pansy? She must have her thoughts too,—experience is not measured by years. Does she give herself in exchange? No, she lets him talk. All she says is merely enough to show that her wings of fancy are strong enough to carry her whithersoever her sympathy wills, that her mind is large enough to contain more than one point of view. And Heaven be praised that Pansy is not one of those women who sew while you talk to them!—who bite their thread with their teeth just when you want them to be overcome with pity or admiration; or thread their needles deliberately just when you expect them to show amazement or wrath. No, Pansy

Fairbairn can sit for hours doing nothing. —Doing nothing, did I say? It is the women that do nothing who influence history, who carry on the work of the world! The busy women merely mend its clothes. How often the inspiring angel of a genius has been a confirmed invalid on a sofa! What should we do without our invalids?—and then people talk of the survival of the fittest!

But Pansy does not always do nothing: she goes regularly with Christopher Fairbairn to his church. I think I began by saying he is an elder, but I have wandered a little. I may have also mentioned that her father was an English rector; but she is large-hearted, and reckons her old father-in-law's gentle contentment above her own æsthetic satisfaction;—for, after all, outward forms of creed are merely sentimental. I made that remark to Fairbairn, to comfort his conscience for taking his English daughter-in-law to his church; but he appeared grieved at the saying; and Mrs. Fairbairn, coming into the room at the moment, and

not understanding its application, laughed lightly and told me to omit the 'merely,' for sentiment was mainly responsible for human destiny.

'Was there much sentiment this morning?' I asked, after Fairbairn had left the room.

'No, but a great deal of human destiny!'

'What do you think of the service?'

'It is very different from ours,' she said simply. And then suddenly she lifted her clouded eyes to mine. 'Let us leave the service alone,' she said; 'but the church—the actual building—why must it be so *ugly*? Outside, it is like a great bank; inside, cold vestibules, with brass plates and black-coated elders, and hats and coats hanging up on pegs! And, in the actual church interior, big plain glass windows, with yellow cotton blinds all dirty and stained with mildew, and little umbrella-stands at the pew doors, and iron racks inside each pew for the tall hat of the *pater familias*!'

'Very convenient,' I suggested.

'No doubt. And it is not meant irrever-

ently, all the disregard for beauty,—the service is reverent. But they seem to approach God unannounced, secure in their own merit of His approval. And one thinks of some quaint little foreign town, clustering up round its protecting Cathedral, and of the soft slam of the padded door, instantly shutting out the garish daylight and all sounds of the world, and the hush and coolness and half light and coloured shadows, the mouldering tracery, the air heavy with incense and age,—the baring of the head,—the bowing of the knee,—the finger dipped in holy water——’

‘Mrs. Fairbairn! You scandalise me! What becomes of the Church Reform Society—the Purity of Worship League? You must not let Mr. Fairbairn hear these—or perhaps,’ I looked at her in curiosity and became serious, ‘perhaps you are a Catholic?’

‘I was speaking from the point of view of sentiment.’

‘Which governs the world.’

‘And the imagination lives on contrasts; so, when I went into that church this

morning, I remembered—oh so vividly!—an old church in Dartmouth that I have never forgotten and never shall forget. It seemed to embody all the resignation and the reverence of centuries. It forced upon you, not so much the *duty* of religion, as its peace and sympathy. I could not describe it now, but the sentiment—' She paused.

'—Remains a life-long influence, like an English University career?'

Pansy smiled. 'And our church at home,' she added slowly.

'Yes?' I asked, and waited.

But Pansy would not talk of that to me, I could see. 'It was a part of home,' was all she said, almost in a whisper.

'And what about the sermon this morning?' I asked, to change the subject for her.

'How like a Scotsman!' she laughed. 'Your beloved sermon! And yet, do you know,' she added quickly, 'I understand the Scotsman's respect for the sermon, now! I realised it as I listened this morning in that bare church. It was a splendid sermon! Not little drowsy, cul-

tured platitudes, but real rousing, vigorous oratory. My father-in-law had prepared my mind to listen with respect and attention, for he had been telling me all the way, as we walked to church, about the part the sermon used to play in the lives of the people, and about the history of the Church, and the great men of past years who are dead now. And this led him to explain to me the differences of Church government and opinion between the two great divisions of the Scottish Church—the Established and the Free. I can see he has never left off being sorry that the ancient Church was ‘rent in twain,’ as he calls it; but he confesses that some of the most famous preachers have been Free-Church men.’

‘It must be difficult for you to understand it all,’ I said.

‘Yes,—it is all new to me, you see. And I am struck by how little we English usually know about Scotland, though we are her near neighbours. An American would be ashamed to be as ignorant as I am,—or rather, as I was.’

‘Yes, Americans certainly take more interest in us.’

‘And have more sympathy, I think. But, now that I have come to live here, I want to find out everything,—not merely fret or laugh at whatever is different from what I have been accustomed to. This matter of the Church, now—it is so *humanly* interesting, it helps me to understand the characters I meet and hear about. Saint Andrew says a great deal of what is best and strongest in the Scottish intellect is owing to the fact that the people have learned to think out difficult points of doctrine every Sunday. He says their “Shorter Catechism” is a popular education in itself! Oh, we have rich talks, Saint Andrew and I.’

She spoke with sudden enthusiasm, and I could see how gladly her lonely heart expanded itself to companionship of the purest and highest that Fate accorded her.

‘And this form of worship,’—she added, musingly,—‘whenever there was anything this morning I did not like—for instance, the—the——’

‘The yellow cotton blinds,’ I suggested.

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‘Well,—yes,’ she owned; ‘then I told myself that, if it has helped to make such people as Saint Andrew,—’ she paused.

‘You told yourself,’ I suggested, ‘that—

“There are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays,

And—every—single—one—of—them—is—right.”’

She smiled recognition of my quotation, and then went on thinking, without heeding me. This marks a degree of intimacy; but it is a method that grows irksome. I watched her, secure in her pre-occupation. Her thoughts were absorbing company, and when at last she looked up her first words proved with whom these thoughts had been. I felt a quick relief that they were in the present, not with the past. Her present I shared; but her past——?

‘It is his eighty-first birthday on the twenty-fourth,’ was what she said. ‘And we have agreed to have a little dinner to celebrate it. I thought it would make him—that it would please him. Will you come?’

CHAPTER VI

SAINT ANDREW'S BIRTHDAY

I REMEMBER that dinner. I woke in the morning with the sensation that something pleasant was going to happen—a feeling I had not enjoyed to the full since my school-days. I almost expected to open my eyes and see my school trunk lying packed and corded on the dormitory floor, and know it was the first day of the holidays. But my opening eyes fell on my silver brushes on the dressing-table, and above it the window with the green blind and a vista of grey chimneys opposite; and I remembered that my school-days were long over, and that to-day was the eighty-first birthday of a gentle old man—that was all.

On my way up to the Law Courts, I dropped into the letter-box next door a packet addressed to Christopher Fairbairn,

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containing an odd little copy I had picked up of the original edition of the account of the crowning of Charles the Second at Scone; and then I made a detour and stopped at a goodly florist's at the West-end, where the window was filled with a brave show of 'reds and whites and yellows,' as Browning carelessly classes them, and sent Mrs. Fairbairn some flowers to deck her table. There was a small glass of pansies on the counter, with their soft, brilliant colours and almost human expressions,—'pansies freaked with jet.' I should dearly have liked to send them, but I felt it would be a gross liberty to handle her name even in this flowery fashion. They were the first of the year—very early, too—probably sent from abroad. I was not going to leave them there for all and sundry to buy, so I purchased them for myself; and to Pansy I sent pink roses on prickly stems, and great sprays of white lilac, and some pale Neapolitan violets, and some dark, sweet Irish ones.

I called in on my way home in the

afternoon, to see if I could help to arrange the flowers: I had a troubled memory of those prickly rose-stems. Pansy received me in the little study. Dear, dear! was this the same room in which old Fairbairn and I had sat and smoked? His table,—the worn leather writing-table,—was pushed back into the window, and in the centre of the floor was a big white deal table, covered with flowers and glasses. The whole room smelt like a conservatory; and there was Pansy, with wet hands, clipping stalks and adding feathery touches of maiden-hair, and frowning over fractious roses that would topple out of their vases.

‘Every vase in the house has been called into use,’ she told me.

A maid came in with a tray while she spoke, and Pansy glanced dubiously at the treasures it contained. They were mostly very ornate china.

‘Those are for the table,’ Pansy said, waving my attention to the top of a book-case covered with slender Venetian ware, with cunning gilt cages inside to hold the top-heavy roses in place.

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'These vases,' I hazarded, 'are yours?'

'Yes;—I unpacked them when your flowers arrived.'

I felt a sudden arterial pressure throughout my system; but I said nothing, merely stood with my back turned to her and surveyed the flowers, and mechanically stooped and smelt them. And all the while I was thinking—thinking—till the hot blood beat against the backs of my eyes, and tingled down to my finger-tips. Had she and that unwhipped hound, Jack Fairbairn, sat at dinner with these vases down the table between them? And how much—and what—was there not between them now? Had he looked across at her, in those early days,—bah! I would like to squeeze the eyes out of his head before he looked on anything else in God's earth! I remembered once when I had fought him,—in the pride of my first holidays home from Harrow,—fought him in the gardens opposite his own house, because, if I remember rightly, he had called my mother a pig. I recollected just the thrill of savage joy as I got his head firmly under

my left arm, and gave one good up-stroke with my fist, and felt the hot blood on my clenched fingers. Well, I had let him go; and he had gone—gone skulking back home, to break his father's heart, and to find Pansy, to sit opposite her at table, to meet her eyes over these self-same vases,—and then—! And Pansy?—had her beautiful, deep, unfathomable eyes looked at him,—and how? Ah, but in those days, over these slim, flame-coloured glasses, they had perhaps been less unfathomable,—they had been innocent, glad, girlish eyes. Then into them must have crept the terror, the loathing, the indignation—

‘Mr. Seton, don't stand there doing nothing, whilst we are all so busy! You can write the menu cards, if you will: I know you are a French scholar!’

And so I was sent over to the leather writing-table. ‘I would not allow them to touch it nor to disturb any of my father-in-law's papers on *any* account,’ Pansy explained, as she swept them all lightly to one side and gave me a new nib for the pen; and for the next half-hour I wrote steadily.

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Then, with my appetite whetted by suggestive titles, we went up, Pansy and I, to find her father-in-law and tea awaiting us in the drawing-room. Christopher Fairbairn had my little book in his hand, and he closed it and rose as we came in, keeping his finger in the place.

'I must thank you, Seton, for this very interesting volume—most interesting, I find it—edifying, I might almost say.'

There was a twinkle of amusement in his blue eyes.

'Ah! perhaps you feel as I do, sir,' it emboldened me to say; 'a trifle sorry for the young king?'

'Well, well. But certainly we do not seem to have been much in awe of royalty in Scotland in those days.'

'What is the book?' asked Pansy, going up behind the chair in which Fairbairn had reseated himself, and leaning over the back of it.

"The Forme and Order of the Coronation of Charles the Second, King of Scotland England France and Ireland; as it was acted and done at Scoone, the

first day of January, 1651”’ Fairbairn read out.

‘Then he was crowned in Scotland nearly ten years before the Restoration!’ exclaimed Pansy. ‘How ignorant I am of Scottish history!’

‘Ay, we crowned him nine years before you did, my dear; but we made him pay hard for it. You must read this, Pansy; decidedly you must read it. I see it is a first edition, Seton,—you are greatly addicted to first editions, I am told.’

‘I picked it up at a book-sale, sir. I thought it might interest you.’

‘I am greatly indebted to you—it was a graceful thought in you, lad, to send the old man a birthday present. It is a long time—a very long time—since I was made the recipient of one, and I have received two to-day!’ he added, turning with a smile to Pansy. ‘I should not be in the least surprised if I came down to-night and found a big pink and white sugar cake in the centre of the dinner-table—dear sake, Pansy my child, what a conflagration eighty-one little wax candles on it would make!’

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Pansy, who had taken the little book I had given Fairbairn, and was standing by the fire reading it, smiled vaguely without looking up. Her father-in-law watched her for a moment, with a little whimsical glint in his eyes. Then he turned to me.

'I am glad to possess that account of the crowning,' he said; 'it affords much food for thought.'

'It no doubt afforded the Merry Monarch much food for thought,—the sermon,' I replied.

'The Reverend Mr. Robert Douglas certainly preached a remarkably long one,' Fairbairn owned.

Pansy came slowly towards us, and laid the book down on the tea-table.

'Listen to this, Mrs. Fairbairn,' I said, taking it up, and turning the leaves to find a passage I remembered. 'May I read you a specimen of the loyalty of a minister of Our Town in the year 1651?'

“There are many Sins upon our King and his Family. Sin will make the surest Crown that ever Man set on to totter. The Sins of former Kings have made this a tottering Crown. I shall

not insist here, seeing there hath been a solemn Day of Humiliation through the Land on *Thursday* last, for the Sins of the Royal Family; I wish the Lord may bless it; and desire the King may be truly humbled for his own Sins, and the Sins of his Fathers House, which have been great. Beware of putting on these Sins with the Crown; for if you put them on, all the Well-wishers to a King in the three Kingdoms, will not be able to hold on the Crown, and keep it from tottering, yea, from falling.”

Pansy took the tiny volume from my hands and turned back the pages, and read with reverent curiosity, acquired, I imagined, among the old books in the Sussex rectory, the title page, in its large uncouth print. Then she became engrossed again, still standing by the mantelpiece. ‘How vividly one sees,’ she said after a pause, ‘the old Kirk of Scone, so plain and simple, so bared of all its ancient ornament; and the young king sitting on a chair by the preacher, like a naughty boy, to be lectured on his duties and the bad deeds of his dead father!’

‘And the grim faces of all those Covenanters round about him,’ said Fairbairn; ‘the nobles, the barons, the burgesses,—I see

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it was the Marquess of Argyll, he who was afterwards beheaded at the Market Cross in Our Town, who put the crown on the king's head.'

'“Honours,” they called them,' said Pansy, reading still. 'The spurs and the sword, the sceptre and the crown, all lying like toys on a table! And the throne was only a stage covered with carpets, with a little stage on the top of it, and a chair on the top of that!—like an erection at a school concert!'

'And not even the historic stone—England had stolen that!' I reminded her.

'But no music,' Pansy said sadly; 'no court ladies, nothing but—but—the sermon!'

'Oh yes,' I said, turning the pages for her as I stood by her, 'before the people would crown him king he had to promise them a great deal!—oaths taken with uplifted hands,—the National Covenant, and the Solemn League and Covenant——'

'Ay, people nowadays forget the history of this last,' put in Fairbairn, stirring his tea contentedly. 'It was subscribed to by the

English nation as well as by the Scottish. I often think it would surprise many an Englishman to be told that Presbyterianism was established in London once, for a few years. Indeed, it is by just a mere chance it is not the established Church of England to this very day!

Pansy gazed at him in wide-eyed consternation.

'Don't you credit him, Mrs. Fairbairn!' I cried. '—Although, now that I come to think of it, he is speaking only the honest truth! But is it not equally true, sir, that we Scotch lost the chance of converting England by our being a little too intolerant?'

'Well, possibly one or two of them were a little bit pernicky, and the others wouldn't stand that. So England was lost.'

Pansy breathed a little sigh of relief. 'It seems to me I am ignorant of English history too,' she said, as she laid the book down, and took the chair I drew forward for her. 'It is hard to believe that all those impolite things were really said, or that the king could have listened to them,' she added, looking thoughtfully into the fire.

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'He had to listen to it all, and to sign all,' Christopher Fairbairn told her.

'I am sorry for him!' she replied, staunchly. And I was a little sorry for the fair young Royalist in exile at my side.

'The Scotch were a very dour race in those days,' I said. 'Stern and narrow and uncompromising, and fond of giving advice.'

'He did not take the advice much to heart,' put in Fairbairn dryly.

'Do you wonder at that, sir? To me this sermon accounts for much.'

Old Christopher shook his head doubtfully, rubbed his hair, and looked troubled.

'I wonder if Charles remembered his crowning at Scone afterwards, during all the pomp and pageantry of the real coronation at Westminster,' said Pansy hastily.

'Yes,' I answered, following her lead, 'while Pepys sat "with a great deal of patience" from four in the morning, in his new velvet coat; and then, poor fellow, could not see from where he sat, nor "come by any" of the silver medals flung about.'

'He was a very lovable character, Samuel Pepys,' said old Christopher.

'If we begin to discuss him I shall stay for ever, and both you and Mrs. Fairbairn must be heartily weary of me!' I cried, starting up. 'It is your own fault, however, for having no clock in the room!'

'There used to be one,' answered Fairbairn, gazing round vaguely. 'There used to be one in the centre of the mantel-piece.'

And I espied a large ornate gold object, in the shape of a crawling snail, on a stand with a glass shade over it, banished to the top of a far-off cabinet.

I left them at six o'clock and returned at eight.

The room was already full when I entered it—at least the space round the big fire was full. It was lit by the soft light of many candles, for Pansy, who had long ago discarded the gas, had supplemented her big shaded lamp to-night by the fat wax candles of Christopher Fairbairn's youth. All the old-fashioned candelabra were filled with them, and they were

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reflected in the dim gilt-framed mirrors behind them. In this soft glow of candle-light Pansy Fairbairn came forward to receive me,—and I—received a new impression of her. I had left her but a couple of hours since, in her dark woollen dress by her tea-table, a little tired, faintly amused by our talk ; and now I saw her for the first time 'walking in silk attire.' She wore a dress of a quaint, rich brocade, as though from the looms of Persia, which seemed as if it had caught the moonbeams in the folds of its mysterious shadowy whiteness, and here and there, flung upon it, were bunches of flowers—dim blue-purple pansies, with dull green leaves. I am not learned in dress, but something in her frock suggested to me the notion that it was not quite of to-day in its fashion. I found myself discovering it to have been one of her wedding-gowns—perhaps never worn till now, and donned now, I verily believe, to please and put honour on her old father-in-law. She wore no jewel, I noticed, save one quaint bracelet that was too big and too heavy for her slender wrist,

and a tiny diamond pendant that flashed from a chain round her throat,—the gift, as I afterwards learned, of her father-in-law that very morning. All her jewels, I had heard it said—how does rumour reach one?—had been taken from her. But Pansy in her *pensee* gown was changed; a little warm geranium pink had stolen into her pale cheeks with the excitement of her first reception in her new home, and her wonderful eyes were full of life. They smiled into mine as she gave me her hand,—for had we not parted but two rounds of the clock ago? and I felt the pleasure of a common understanding with this pansy queen. Having shaken hands with Christopher Fairbairn, whom the exercise of hospitality had made very happy, I looked round and saw several faces familiar at the gatherings in Our Town. Mrs. Fairbairn had evidently selected her guests with a view to her father-in-law's enjoyment. It was a small party, ten or twelve in all, and among them were Fairbairn's favourite old minister and his wife, a retired divinity professor, a

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kindly judge, full of anecdote and irony, and all Fairbairn's cronies. I joined a group of men, and watched Pansy moving about among her guests. It was true what I had told Christopher Fairbairn: his daughter-in-law had made friends with every one. The stiff inhabitants of Our Town had yielded to the undefined charm of manner that disarmed prejudice. Yet it seemed to me, watching her, that, with all her sweetness, she maintained a certain unconscious and delicate aloofness. Hers was not the cold and glaringly apparent barrier that Our Town is well used to,—it was no grey stone wall nor chilly moat surrounding a citadel,—it was a soft, dew-bespangled web of gossamer wrapped round a closed flower. She was not cold; she was neither stiff nor shy; she was, in fact, almost childishly appealing; but still she never yielded an inch towards intimacy.

I was sent down with the retired divinity professor's daughter; but only the witty judge separated her from Pansy, so I sometimes caught part of Pansy's con-

versation with him, or with Fairbairn's spiritual pastor and master on her right, at the opposite side of the table.

The old judge appealed to me once. 'Seton here ought to be able to tell us that,' I heard him say. 'He is great on that kind of thing, and spends half his days down in the archives under our Library. Seton!—Mrs. Fairbairn tells me she has been going through a course of Sir Walter, and we were speaking of *The Abbot*, where the heroine is a namesake of your own. Whereabout in Our Town is the town house of the Setons that Scott describes, and when was it demolished?'

'The house?—oh yes!—"My Lord Seyton's lugeing in the Canongate,"' I answered. 'It was near Holyrood, on the site of Whitefoord House. It was there that Darnley stayed, and Manzeville, the French ambassador. But it was pulled down—let me see—well, in Gordon of Rothiemay's bird's-eye view of Our Town it stands entire, with all its courts and pleasure-gardens; that brings it to the middle of the seventeenth century.'

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'Pulled down? But Scott's description of it?' objected Pansy.

'Ah, that is mere poetic licence,' I replied.

'What! all the paved courts and the sculpture and the dim light through the latticed windows of painted glass, and all the intricate descriptions of the heraldry—all poetic licence?'

'All, all!'

And then the divinity professor's daughter on my other side asked me in an aggrieved voice if I were a member of the Scottish History Society, which of course I am, and changed the conversation.

I resisted the temptation to outstay the other guests, that I might not seem to assert a position of intimacy with the household. But I remembered I had left a newspaper, that I had brought to show Fairbairn, on the piano; and half an hour later, when I had seen the last carriage drive away, I went back for it.

'Is every one gone?' I asked the servant.

'Yes, sir,' he said, and left me to find my way up alone, evidently considering

a second announcement in one evening superfluous.

The drawing-room door was ajar, and, as I reached it, suddenly my heart seemed to leap and shrink and stand still, for there was a faint sound within, the sound of a woman sobbing; and through the open door I saw a slight, white-clad figure kneeling, and a little dark head bent low. I turned and stole downstairs softly, and let myself out into the damp, cold night, where a film of mist veiled the watery moon. For who was I that I could comfort her? Who was I that I should overhear her grief? What memories was she struggling with that had been recalled to-night?

CHAPTER VII

A VISITE DE DIGESTION

THE next time I met Mrs. Fairbairn was several days later, in the chief street of Our Town, under the shadow of the Castle. I turned and walked beside her.

'You have not been near me since my dinner-party,' she said.

'I was promising myself the pleasure of coming this afternoon, if I may, to pay my formal *visite de digestion*,' I answered, reflecting guiltily how near I had been to her since I had said good-bye that night, albeit she remained unconscious of my intrusion.

'This afternoon? Why, then, you had better come with me now. I am going home.' And it occurred to me suddenly that it was already five o'clock; but the

day had only just begun for me when I met her.

‘It was a great success, was it not?’ I said, as we turned down the hill homewards.

‘Do you really think so?’ she answered, looking up with frank, childish pleasure. ‘Saint Andrew was pleased; but I wanted to ask you, because my dear Saint Andrew would be pleased with whatever I did.’

I thought it better to ignore the implied distinction.

‘It is so difficult to find one’s way in a strange town—I don’t mean in the streets; that is quite easy here, where they are all built at right angles—I mean among the people.’

‘And are we not rather angular also?’

‘Are you? But is there not some term in mathematics something about “squaring a circle”? Well, a hostess’s bounden duty is just the opposite; she must form a circle out of all the angles. How delightful Lord Myln is! A very lawyer, with his small wizened face all puckered up with intellect and cynical

humour. A delightful person to take you down to dinner, but what an utterly different type of man from Saint Andrew! I think there is no one like Saint Andrew.'

'Yes, Lord Myln represents one type of the successful and brilliant barrister,' I answered. 'I'll tell you another—Sir John Macmillan; have you met him?—with his strong square jaw and strong square shoulders, and heavy-lidded eyes and grizzled hair? You should hear him torture a witness!'

Pansy's face clouded slightly. 'Of course his branch of the law is different. I can't imagine Saint Andrew pleading. Yes, I suppose you could never call him brilliant; but surely he is successful, in one sense of the word?'

'In one sense, yes; and perhaps it is the higher sense,' I answered, for old Fairbairn was not successful in the usual sense of the term. He had succeeded his father and grandfather, and the old firm owed its standing more to having stood so long and so respectably, than to any acute business faculty on the part of the present

bearer of the name that could be read in small, almost obliterated characters on the much-polished brass plate on the door. The name of the firm of Keith and Fairbairn does not appear often in the newspapers; but at the office of Keith and Fairbairn repose the boxes of trust deeds of many an old Scottish house.

‘I suppose a man may be called successful if every one that knows him respects his character and likes him personally?—even loves him personally, if privileged to know him at all well.’

‘Yes,’ agreed Pansy; ‘but I suppose you mean he might have made more of himself.’

‘If he had pushed himself,—been less diffident, less reticent,—had more ambition and less pride,—been more astute and less simple-minded——’

‘In fact, not been the character that makes every one respect and love him!’

And then Pansy half lowered her eyelashes to hide the look of pride I had surprised in her dark eyes.

‘I fancy any degree of worldly success

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must presuppose a certain amount of selfishness,' she said.

'That is a hard doctrine!'

'No; because does not the selfishness of the individual often make for the general good?'

'I daresay it may, because, after all, a successful career can't be accomplished without great selfishness; and yet, the world cannot spare its successful careers. We blame the selfishness that results in an idler, but we never question that which is combined with other strong qualities, and so produces a great general, a great judge, a great poet, a great thinker, a great statesman——'

'Are all great men selfish, Mr. Seton?'

'Read their biographies!' I answered, as she gave me her latch-key to open the door. 'Especially if written by their wives,' I added, as I fitted it into the keyhole.

Pansy considered that gravely. 'Perhaps,' she suggested, 'the wife is the last person who ought to write a life of her husband. She does not see him in perspective.'

‘And so, as the poet saith,

“Wives of great men all remind us
That great men are *not* sublime”?’

‘But *I* was always brought up to consider parodies next door to profane quotations,’ said Pansy, taking up the letters off the hall table as she passed it.

‘And *I*,’ I maintained boldly, ‘regard parody as the highest tribute any one can pay to a writer.’

Pansy deigned no reply : she had reached the study door, and she opened it and peeped in.

‘Here I am, Saint Andrew!’ she cried, brightly, ‘and I have brought Mr. Seton home to pay his duty call on us.’

Saint Andrew emerged, his soft hair a little ruffled, and a loose grey coat on.

‘Glad to see you, Seton,’ he said. ‘Why have you been neglecting us? Has my daughter told you her new plan?’

‘I have not been so far honoured.’

‘Ah well, she wants to consult you. Go up and I will join you when I have changed my coat.’

'You look very nice in that one,' said Pansy, peeling a grey glove off inside out, and lightly caressing down the ruffled hair on his forehead with her little bare hand.

'No, no, my dear,' her father-in-law said, looking down at the offending garment in agitated apology; 'this is not a coat in which to approach a lady's tea-table.'

'You sweet, punctilious Saint Andrew! How nice it must have been to live in the days when every one was as chivalrous as you!'

'And when was that, Mrs. Fairbairn?' I inquired.

'I don't know,' she answered, as she turned and led the way upstairs, 'unless it was at the court of King Arthur.'

'It was Enid who changed her dress, not Geraint,' I objected.

Pansy threw off her cape and sat down by the tea-table.

'You have known him for a long time, I suppose?' she questioned, dreamily, handling the little old silver caddy.

'Known him?—Known Mr. Fairbairn? Oh yes, off and on, since I was a boy.'

Pansy was silent. The thought leaped up into both our minds that, if I had known Christopher Fairbairn since I was a boy, then must I also have known Christopher Fairbairn's son. The unspoken thought was so prominent between us that I hastened to break the awkwardness of the silence it filled.

'I was away a good deal,' I said, 'at school and college, and my own people lived a little out of Our Town all summer. But they knew your father-in-law pretty well. I myself really knew him only by sight and by name, as a boy would, until I settled here as his next-door neighbour.'

'When was that?'

'Six years ago.'

We were on dangerous ground. It was four years ago that I had heard that Jack Fairbairn had married somewhere in England. How vaguely I remembered it, —a passing wonder whether this would heal up the breach between the father and the undutiful scapegrace, and a passing pity for the unknown wife; for I had always heartily disliked young Fairbairn—

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he was not the sort of man who could win the liking of his own sex,—with his weak, handsome face, his colossal selfishness, and his boundless egoism; and my distrust of him was amply justified afterwards, when the news came that explained old Fairbairn's grey, stricken, pitiful face. But, at the time when I heard the son was married, it had aroused less than a passing interest in me. 'Some-one in England,'—that was all. Some-one in England! Is everything pre-ordained? or does Chance rattle the dice-box of Fate?

'The old servants,' continued Pansy hesitatingly, '—Lauder has been with him for eighteen years—tell me he is so much changed since I came.'

I thought it was merely that she wished to be assured that her presence was doing good to him, and I told her eagerly how different he was,—how lonely he used to seem, how I used to come in of an evening sometimes for very pity; and I even told her of his fears regarding the refurnishing of the study. She smiled and listened, and waited and smiled again,

slowly pulling her gloves right side out, with the firelight playing on her little hands. But still she seemed to wait for more; and so at last I paused, to give her the lead.

‘He is so gentle to me, so considerate, so wonderfully kind. Is that—was he always—?’ She bent over the gloves.

I reflected: and then suddenly I saw what she was asking for. She wanted to know how her husband had been brought up,—how much of his character was avoidable,—whether anything could be excused him.

What angels of pity these women are! These good women, these women tenderly nurtured, these women whose first revelation of evil comes to them in the failure of some one they love! Are their judgments a foretaste of the final Judgment that shall be meted out to each one of us? And is the old copy-book heading, ‘God is Love,’ after all the key that shall unlock the mystery? Love?—*love*? Ah! I had known she must have loved him once; but—did she love him *still*?

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Pansy looked up, surprised at my silence, met my eyes, and dropped her own again.

But my question was answered. Her eyes were deep and dark with the haunted look they had worn when she first came. 'They say that pity is akin to love'; but sometimes it is Pity who begets Love, and sometimes it is that Love, when she dies, leaves Pity, a little weak motherless babe, behind her, to try to fill her place, and to bear a faint, heart-rending likeness to her. I knew now that I could afford to excuse Jack Fairbairn to Pansy.

'I think it is your father-in-law's nature to be gentle and considerate and kind, especially to women,' I answered. 'He is wonderfully tolerant, wonderfully appreciative of other people and depreciative of himself. But there is the tolerance born of understanding and sympathy, and there is the tolerance of innocence, which is sometimes not so helpful nor so wise. The pure in heart, we are told, shall see God. And perhaps they do see good more clearly than they see evil.'

'And is that not so helpful?'

‘As a preventive, perhaps; but not as a cure, I fancy.’

Pansy leant forward and clasped her hands.

‘A character like his,’ she said; ‘—oh, he ought to be made happy!’

‘A character like his,’ I repeated, ‘is the outcome of a life. He is over eighty years old, and he has suffered, as every one must. We are looking at the finished work now.’

There was a little silence between us. Something in the droop of Pansy’s head reminded me of what I had seen that night when I returned after her guests had gone, and I roused myself, and said, in a cheerful voice that made her look up quickly, ‘I was wrong to say “finished work,” for his experiences are not yet over. You are something new and wonderful to him, Mrs. Fairbairn: he has never had a daughter.’

Pansy smiled gravely.

‘He is so good to me,’ she said simply. ‘Before I came I was afraid——’ she paused.

Afraid, did she mean, of the unknown father of a bad husband?

‘—Afraid he might find me in his way,’

she ended. No, it had not been of herself she had thought, but of him. It was not a statement I could answer.

‘Don’t you sometimes notice,’ I said, ‘that men who have never had daughters of their own are very shy and tender to a young girl, and somewhat afraid of her? And to a man without a wife or sisters any woman is a troublous and charming mystery, you know. It is a quarter of a century since Mr. Fairbairn’s wife died.’

Pansy looked up quickly.

‘You do not remember her, I suppose?’ she asked with eagerness.

‘I was ten years old,’ I answered. ‘I can faintly remember a dark, sweet-faced woman, with a white dress, and curls at the side of her face. It was at a children’s party I came to once—it must have been in this very room!’ I exclaimed, looking round it.

‘And she died——’

‘When her son was seven years old,’ I said, with my eyes still averted; ‘and since then Mr. Fairbairn has lived here, with no woman in his life,—twenty-five years, the

last ten completely alone. You do not know the difference that your coming has made,—it has been like warmth and light brought into a darkened chamber. The light has revealed all he is,—it may have been there before, but it was all in darkness. The house, Mrs. Fairbairn, was like a sepulchre,—a chilly sepulchre of dead loves and lives. A man alone, growing old in such surroundings,—a kindly, shy, sensitive man,—it needs something as soft as a woman's touch,—he will perhaps yield to that, will both give and take sympathy from her,—but——'

'I understand,' said Pansy.

But I had made a clumsy thing of it. The father and son had never hit it off, that was the truth. For one thing, the father had never, all the years they lived alone together, discovered his son's character. Old Christopher Fairbairn was too respectful of others, too pure-minded, ever to suspect evil or recognise it. He was so strangely innocent, in spite of all his scholarly insight, that he could live for years and never see what would have been

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apparent in two days to a citizen of the world. And, when first the shadow of disgrace crept into his life, he had been so shocked and miserable that, never doubting but that this was the first time and would assuredly be the last, and that Jack was as wretched and shamed as he was himself, the poor stricken father was overcome by sensitive pity for his son's humiliation, and could not bring himself to mention the matter, but merely tried nervously to cover the recoiling horror he felt for the sin by a fastidious gentleness toward the sinner. Unwise, perhaps. But was it not that same shame for sin that was first felt and taught by One who could not look nor admonish, but bent His head and wrote with His finger in the sand? And to Jack Fairbairn such an attitude was as inexplicable as it was to the gaping, stonethrowing, puzzled Jews.

But how could I tell Pansy all this? It was better that she should imagine he had been stern;—and so he had, when it was too late.

The door opened, and Saint Andrew came in, a long black figure, his silver hair brushed softly, his blue eyes a little watery and tired.

I rose, and pushed forward his chair, and Pansy put a cushion behind his head, and busied herself pouring out his tea.

‘Have you told Mr. Seton your plan?’ he asked, taking the cup from her with a hand that shook a little.

‘My plan? Ah, yes,—we are thinking, Saint Andrew and I, of having a children’s party.’

She paused suddenly, and looked at me. We both remembered that other children’s party I had spoken of, held in this same room. Then we looked at Saint Andrew; but he was stirring his tea unconsciously: he had forgotten.

‘Pansy has discovered a dense population under twelve years of age in Our Town,’ he said, ‘and she tells me she wants to make friends with it.’

‘They will fight under the tables, and upset everything in the house,’ I said, rather crossly.

‘Oh no, they won’t,’ she answered; ‘and, if they do, it will all get straight again! Don’t you think one is apt to grow old unless one has youth about one? It is healthy and natural, is it not? You might as well say that Spring upsets Winter.’

‘So it does!’ I maintained stoutly.

‘And Spring is the saddest season of all the year—the persistent hopefulness is so overcoming! But I am sorry you don’t approve of my plan: I had meant you to come and help.’

‘Oh, I will come!’ I cried. ‘I can play at musical chairs, and act charades dressed up in mats and shawls, and dance bent down double to reach my partner’s sash; and I am so glad that Christmas is over, so that you cannot ask me to dress up as Old Father Christmas, and speak in a squeaky voice, and feel very hot and stifling under a mask and a cotton-wool wig and beard.’

‘Ah, I see you know all about it,’ Pansy rejoined calmly.

‘So you intend us all to turn into bairns again, Pansy?’ said old Fairbairn.

‘Do you feel it would disturb your evening, Saint Andrew?’ She bent forward and stroked his old hand, as it lay on his thin knee, and looked up wistfully into his face.

‘Saint Andrew loves children,’ I said carelessly. ‘He has a strange weakness for a thing that crows and gurgles—I have caught him gazing at one with a kind of awe-stricken admiration——’ I stopped suddenly, cursing myself for a blundering fool, as the fire leaped up and showed me Pansy’s eyes.

‘You are tired this afternoon, Saint Andrew,’ she said, as her little smooth white hand folded round the heavily veined one it had been stroking.

‘Yes, I feel a little weary, Pansy,’ he answered her, with a surprised smile at her solicitude.

I rose to go, and left them in the fire-light together.

CHAPTER VIII

A WET SUNDAY IN OUR TOWN

IT was a cold, grey, damp, foggy morning ; a depressing morning ; the morning of a wet, depressing day ; one of our long, sunless days. Moreover, it was Sunday. I stood at my sitting-room window, whose white lace curtains seemed suddenly to have adopted the general hue of greyness, and looked at the trees in the gardens across the road. They were bare of leaf, just beginning to bud, and they stood outlined, as though in Indian ink, against the unrelieved photograph grey of the sky. There was no rain falling ; but the pavement was wet, drops of moisture hung motionless from the area railings, and the grass in the gardens looked sodden.

Suddenly the stillness was broken by a bell,—a church-bell. Then another began,

and then presently there was a perfect clamour of them, in all different keys and cadences and distances, from the big one that had struck the first note, and who was evidently very near and very cracked and very ponderous in action, to the distant chimes that threaded their frolicsome rapidity through the reverberations of the others, and belonged, I knew, to the Episcopal Cathedral.

In a few moments the wet, deserted street was filled with groups of church-goers. Front doors opened to admit solid family phalanxes. A mother, with a daughter on either side of her, like a substantial sandwich, followed by a stout father with a son in Eton jacket and tall hat, carrying an umbrella and a Bible. Then a husband and wife walking together, with three consciously elegant children in front. Then two ladies, kilting their skirts high, with display of marvellous silks and ribbons, and picking their way daintily.

Presently I heard the next door bang, and Pansy and her father-in-law stood for a moment on the broad steps, while Pansy

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uplifted her face to feel whether it were raining, glanced anxiously at the general murky aspect of the weather, and then raised her hand and turned up Christopher Fairbairn's coat collar. I smiled to myself, for old Fairbairn was very punctilious in his dress, and would dislike that coat collar turned up; but he submitted, crossed round to the outer side, took Pansy's books from her and slipped them into a capacious pocket, and then they walked along the street together. I watched them,—the tall, thin old man, leaning slightly on his umbrella, and the slim figure beside him, in her graceful black gown and black plumed hat, and with some rich arrangement of fur and lace round her. The bells quickened, and so did the pace of the people passing, and the distant Cathedral chimes, as if in contradiction, relapsed into a single stroke. Then from far and near all denominations agreed in the announcement of the truth that it was eleven o'clock—though they differed a second or two in their conception of the exact moment—and again silence reigned, till by five minutes past

eleven the street was empty, save for one or two hurrying maid-servants in their Sunday best. The good people were all worshipping; and I turned away from the damp, grey scene to my Sunday morning occupation of getting through arrears of letters.

I gave the peacefully slumbering fire an uplifting kick with the toe of a much-abused slipper, and sent it into sudden roaring warmth. To this I added a log of wood that induced much crackling, and I lit a cigarette, cursed the weather and my correspondence, and sat down to think things over.

I had very, very often been in love in my life: it was a luxury I had never thought of denying myself. Indeed, it was only quite lately that I had begun to enjoy the luxury of not being in love. It is a sign of middle life when one speaks of 'a nice quiet time.'

And now? What was the difference? Well, it was all the difference in the world. I will not say, as people usually do, that it was the difference between the unreal and the real. No, the others were real

enough. But it was the difference between the real and its ideal prototype. The others had been, as I say, quite real; but they had owed their reality to their mere existence, and with the ends of their existences (six months) their reality was over. I had been living amid the shadows of Plato's cave, with my back to the sunlight. And now I had turned, and I could never live content among the shadows again. But, between me and the open air of heaven, lay, stealthy amid the grass, that poisonous adder Jack Fairbairn. And if I ignored him, if I set my heel on his head, he would rear his venomous sting and strike—not me, but—Pansy.

She could, of course, obtain a divorce. Apart from everything else, she could do this. But she never would do it! Never, at least, during the lifetime of that delicate, sensitive old man, Jack Fairbairn's unhappy father. And what reason had Pansy to wish to legalise her freedom? A profound contempt for all I was and ever had been and ever should be came over me, as my cigarette smoked itself out.

Well, if I liked to make myself miserable,—or rather, if I liked to make myself happy and obstinately close my eyes to the misery in the future,—it was no man's business but my own. And so I went over the beaten tracks that many a man has been over before me, and arrived at the same conclusion,—to let things drift meanwhile, and trust to ultimate flight if my substratum of common sense showed signs of drifting too.

The noise of footsteps in the street warned me that the churches had 'scaled,' as is said in *Our Town*, and I went to the window to find that the heavy mist had settled into drizzling rain, and that every one was hurrying past, and my view was chiefly of wet umbrellas and undesirable feet and flounces.

After luncheon I got out my letters, answered one of them, and then slept peacefully till aroused by the noisy entrance of three men and an Irish terrier with an unblushing appetite. After I had declined the suggested allurements of penny bridge, and had been called sulky and seedy, I was

left to myself. The rain had by now stopped, and the grey sky had lightened above, and deepened to a dirty yellow below. I took down my coat and brushed my hat and sallied forth as far as the pillar-box at the corner to post my letter, and then I went in next door, for Pansy was usually at home on Sunday afternoons. I found her still with her hat on, and her furs flung off on a chair. She was standing by the tea-table, pouring out tea, and old Fairbairn was in his big easy-chair, leaning forward warming his hands, with his tea, in his own special big cup, on a little stand drawn up to his side.

‘Have you never changed your wet frock since this morning?’ I asked Mrs. Fairbairn, with a reproving look at her father-in-law.

‘I saw to her changing her feet,’ he answered, with the calm assurance of rectitude.

Pansy laughed at the expression, new to her English ears. ‘How do you know I was in the rain?’ she asked.

‘I saw you pass on your way to church,

and then the rain began ; so you must have been caught in it coming home.'

'We took a cab,' she said demurely. 'So your reasoning is wrong. A lawyer should never ignore his minor premises.'

'Then why was the change of feet necessary?' I inquired, judicially.

'Oh, I withdraw what I said! Your acuteness as a lawyer is established. I went out again, if you insist on the truth, this afternoon. Saint Andrew was resting. I went to—to—Evensong.' She glanced at me rather guiltily.

'Sentiment?' I inquired, taking my cup from her.

'Can the leopard change his spots?' put in old Fairbairn, who was evidently in high good humour. 'It is a sad thing, is it not, Gavin Seton,' he went on, 'to see any one who has had the true path pointed out to her, who has had her feet set in it, voluntarily turning back—there, there, I was only chivying you, dear lassie! I am afraid I am a selfish old man, letting you accompany me in the mornings. But she takes a woman's way,

Seton! She puts a cushion behind a helpless old Presbyterian's head, and, when he shuts his eyes for a moment, she is off to her "Evensong"! Terrible!' He patted the hand that was stretched out for his cup.

'Never mind, Mrs. Fairbairn,' I said, 'there were always plenty of Episcopalians in Scotland—almost all our Scottish historians, I think, were Episcopal. But Episcopacy became so mixed up with Jacobitism that it was almost a political movement to crush it out. We hear so much about the persecutions of the Covenanters, but there are stories of the persecutions of the Episcopalians that are just as romantic! The Scottish Episcopal Church—when I remember how staunch it remained to the Stuarts, long after their cause was lost—almost it persuades me! Lady Nairne belonged to it, you know—I have seen her copy of the Communion Service. But there is some slight difference between the Scottish Episcopal service and the English Church service, is there not?' I asked.

'It was the likenesses that struck me, said Pansy softly.

Old Fairbairn looked up with quick sympathy.

‘Ah! if we noticed only the great areas of likeness in our creeds, instead of proclaiming the small patches of difference!’ he said. ‘There have been two men, lately, who must needs spend their time as God’s ministers in abusing one another’s knowledge of Bible criticism over a special remark of—Elijah’s, I think it was.’

‘I never liked Elijah,’ observed Pansy, irrelevantly, to her fire-screen.

‘Why, my dear?’ Fairbairn looked surprised.

‘Because he was so rude and cruel to poor Jezebel.’

‘My love! She was not a very estimable character, was she?’

‘Perhaps not, altogether; but surely that is no reason to treat her ungently.’

‘No; but you cannot apply modern standards to the conduct of that age, my child.’

‘Then, in all fairness, if you don’t apply them to Elijah, neither must you apply them to Jezebel! All she did was to

deceive, and it was done for her husband's sake, which was counted a virtue then,—and sometimes is even now! And, whatever she did or left undone, she surely atoned for everything by her splendid conduct at the end, when she stood in that window and, knowing herself surrounded by savage enemies, called down, as Jehu clattered in below, “Had Zimri peace who slew his master?” And then Jehu shouted, “Throw her down!”—the queen!—and a woman!—and they threw her down, the cowards!’

‘Yes, she was a brave woman to do that,’ Christopher Fairbairn owned gravely.

‘Brave?—Yes, poor woman! She was as brave as a Briton, and a far more devoted wife than the applauded Griselda.’

Fairbairn shook his white head uneasily. The rooted notions of over eighty years could not be resigned without a pang.

‘What do *you* think, Seton?’ he asked.

‘That I must read up *Kings*,’ I replied.

‘They say an Episcopalian never knows the Bible,’ laughed Pansy, ‘having had his attention from youth riveted on his Prayer-

book. I was told at a dinner the other evening,' she went on, turning to me, 'that no one who has been reared an Episcopalian knows the story of Jonah and the gourd, and that the invariable answer is, "Jonah and the *gourd*?—the *gourd*? Oh, don't you mean the *whale*?"' And, coming home, I told my father, and owned, in the friendly darkness of the cab, to a slight vagueness in memory concerning Jonah and the gourd, having always associated him with a whale. And Saint Andrew was *so* troubled! He told me the whole story as we drove home, and made me promise him to re-read it.'

'But she knew it perfectly well,' Fairbairn hastened to explain.

'Yes. The difficulty lay in associating it with Jonah. I don't mind confessing now, since Mr. Seton owns to ignorance of *Kings*.'

'Oh, he'll learn, he'll learn!' Fairbairn replied encouragingly; and we both laughed.

'Did you enjoy "Evensong," Mrs. Fairbairn?' I asked, when her father-in-law had been called away.

'Yes. It reminded me of my father,' she answered simply. 'I thought of all the years he had toiled—' she paused, and sat looking down at the fire. 'He was a country rector,' she went on, presently, 'not a scholar, like the one who preached to-day; but he had the same spiritually refined face, full of tolerant charity.'

'There is something in your Church that produces that type of face, I think.'

'I suppose every profession stamps its devotees,' she answered.

'Yes, you can always tell a lawyer of Our Town,' I assented. 'A very few years of it moulds his mouth and spoils his manners.'

'You should not cultivate an introspective habit of mind,' advised my hostess; 'it paralyses energy.'

And I thought uneasily of all my letters, lying still unanswered on my writing-table.

'Your father,' I said; '—then you can remember him?'

'Oh, of course I can! He—it was only three years ago.'

Three years ago! That was since her marriage, then.

I tried to formulate the question, but could not word it. She answered it herself, though.

‘He lived to marry me,’ she said.

I remained silent.

‘And he died four months later,’ she added. Was there a strange note of gladness in her low voice, that told me Pansy’s father had been spared all knowledge of the deed he did in marrying her?

‘And your mother?’ I asked.

‘My mother died when I was sixteen.’

I suddenly tried to imagine what Pansy was like when she was sixteen.

‘Were you in the country then?’ I asked presently, for I wanted to fill in the background of my picture.

Pansy had evidently been following another line of thought, for she looked up a little dazed.

‘Country?’ she repeated, ‘Oh yes, always the country. My father was a thorough country man—he was never more miserable, he used often to tell me, than when, just after he left Oxford, he was appointed curate in one of the Black

Country towns. Then he got this living in Sussex, and held it till his death.'

'Was he at all like Mr. Fairbairn?'

'Not the least! For one thing, he was English—I don't believe he ever thought about such a place as Scotland; or, if he did, he imagined it a land of rivers and hills where people resorted in summer to fish and to shoot. In spite of the Union, there is something essentially different to this day between an Englishman and a Scotsman; and Saint Andrew is very Scotch, is he not?'

'Very!' I agreed. 'And he is not only a typical Scot, he is a typical product of Our Town.'

'I have finished the Waverley Novels,' said Pansy, with the least little glint of a smile.

'Then begin a course of Meredith, or Rudyard Kipling, or Anthony Hope,' I advised her, 'before your father-in-law suggests that you begin again at Waverley!'

'He has already done so,' Pansy replied—'and I rather think I will!'

CHAPTER IX

MY HOLIDAY

I WISHED that Mrs. Fairbairn had not selected Saturday morning to come up to the Courts and send in her card to me and demand to be shown 'the inside,' because Saturday happens to be the day when all the divorce cases are on,—the day on which, in the afternoon, one of the evening papers heads a column 'Unhappy Marriages,' which sounds interesting and romantic, but is disappointing reading—like the *menus* in some hotels, that sound so French and good, and prove ill-cooked common-places. But she came, and told me it was a sudden fancy. Saint Andrew, she said, had shown her, long ago, the Heart of Midlothian; and he had taken her into the old Cathedral to see the tombs of Argyll and Montrose, and the verger had told her all about Jenny Geddes;

and she had seen John Knox's house, and the Castle, and everything, long, long ago;—oh, and Saint Andrew had even taken her down several old closes, and, dear old Saint, had never seemed to notice how terribly, disgracefully, shockingly dirty they were. But he had said he would leave the Law Courts to me. So she had come this morning, because she thought I would not be so busy on Saturday. Busy,—bless her! I immediately looked as professional and consequent as I could, pushed my wig back wearily, and said I was fortunately not especially busy to-day—the fact was, I added, it was the day for all the divorce cases. And, when I said that, her sweet face grew troubled.

‘Are you saying it just to tease me?’ she asked.

I repudiated the suggestion indignantly.

‘I—I don't think I'll go in,’ she decided, with distaste, as I opened one of the swing doors.

But I took her in, and she heard what she was pleased to call a nugget of evidence. It was a shabby young woman in the witness-

box, anxious-eyed and twisty-fingered, and perfectly inaudible.

‘Poor thing!’ murmured Pansy.

‘What did your father do? Eh? What? Oh, angry, was he?—Used bad language?—Eh? Oh, *swore*, did he? Yes, exactly. What did he say?’

‘How unkind to ask!’ Pansy whispered, indignantly. The girl in the witness-box evidently thought so too. She needed much persuasion and prompting.

‘Well, come now, what did he say? Oh!—“Damn,”—exactly so, thank you.’ The ruts round the counsel’s mouth deepened into a momentary grin, and then puckered up again as he snapped his mouth shut.

We slipped back through the swing door, laughing, and went into the library hall, and saw the source of all the new gossip, and looked at all the old pictures, and talked of the old times, and of the men that belonged to them.

Then I took her down to the documents—the manuscript of *Marmion*, and all our treasures; and she flitted about and bent over them,—such a slight little graceful

black figure, with one hand resting on the book, and the other gathering the fulness of her skirts off the dusty floor. There was something quaint and severe, too, like an old picture, about the square lace collar that hung over the transparent black material of her bodice, and in the soft plumes of the big black hat that shaded her eyes. I had a sudden inspiration. 'Mrs. Fairbairn, have you anything on for this afternoon?'

She raised her eyes from the page.

'N—no, not specially. I had some calls to pay.'

'Oh, Saturday is a bad day for calls. What do you say, as I happen not to be overpressed with business to-day,—a thing that doesn't often occur,—to giving me a holiday?'

'Giving you a holiday?' she repeated, questioningly; and the man who had got out *Marmion* for us smiled, and turned away.

'Yes. Let us go and have luncheon somewhere, and then—well, have you been yet to our polo-field? It is Saturday, and such a fine day—a thing, like my not being

busy, that does not often happen. Would you feel inclined to go? It is rather pretty—at any rate, it is the only thing of the sort that we have in Our Town.'

And to my surprise she liked to go very much.

'The fact is, Saint Andrew has a meeting this morning, and another this afternoon, and is lunching with some one between them and going on with him. So I am free too.'

'We haven't any very thrilling place to lunch at in Our Town,' I said regretfully; but she waved all my suggestions aside. 'You must come to my club,' she said.

'Your club?'

'Yes; some one insisted on proposing me, and I am a member. I very seldom go, somehow; but it is a charming place, and this is just the occasion to make it useful as well as ornamental. Is there not a Seton's Close somewhere near here?' she asked, as we crossed the High Street.

'Yes,—down there. I had the curiosity once to go and look at it. I was passing by, and I saw a street sweeper open a little old

wooden door with "Seaton's Close" above it, push in his barrow, and lock the door again. So pride of race awoke in me—"How are the mighty fallen!" I said, and my hand went instinctively to my pocket, and the street sweeper amiably unlocked the door again and let me peep in. Do you know what I saw, Mrs. Fairbairn?—it really wasn't worth the shilling, except as a lesson in humility. I saw—the barrow, and a broom. Seaton's Close just holds them, no more: and that is the use to which it is now put. The fact is, only the narrow entry remains, blocked up, forming a little cellar; the close itself has been knocked down, to make room for a Board School that is built at the back. I hate free education.'

'And is that where

"A countess fair gazed o'er a window hie"?''

I smiled—for had I not given her the book from which she was quoting?

"And pined to see the genty shape o' bonny Mally Lee"?''

I answered. 'No; that was "Seton's

Land"—it was in Liberton's Wynd, and is all vanished.'

So we drifted into talk of the book and all its fascinating legends and traditions of the various closes and 'lands' and wynds: of the lovely daughters of Lady Maxwell of Monreith,—one of them afterwards the Duchess of Gordon,—catching and riding vagrant swine up and down the High Street; of Susanna, Countess of Eglintoun and her seven beautiful daughters being carried in slow defile in eight sedan chairs out of the darkness of their narrow close down to the Assembly Rooms in the West Bow; of Lord Grange, who spirited his wife away to a lonely island, and kept her a prisoner till her death,—but who was greatly alarmed at the thought of the moral effect Allan Ramsay's circulating library of fiction would have on the mind of youth. And, talking, we left the old town behind us, and reached Mrs. Fairbairn's club.

When we came out again Pansy paused a moment on the doorstep, with a pre-occupied look, and she opened her lips to speak, and then hesitated. I had a horrid

fear she had forgotten an engagement, as she turned to me with apology in her eyes.

‘Mr. Seton,—I wonder if you would mind waiting? The fact is, Saint Andrew bought me a hat yesterday.’

‘Saint Andrew bought you a hat!’

My consternation, and the picture of old Fairbairn choosing millinery, were too much for Pansy’s gravity: her eyes filled with laughter.

‘Yes, he did! Was it not sweet of him? I was buying a hat, and he came in with me, and seemed quite interested; and he—he liked me in one that I said I could not afford; and besides, it was—well, it was not the sort of hat I wanted. But, *do* you know what he did? He went back, without telling me, and bought it!’

‘Well done, Saint Andrew!’

She looked such a child standing there, telling me about her hat, with her eyes laughing into mine as unconsciously as any child’s, and the flush of shyness and pleasure on her cheeks. Was this the dignified Pansy of the flowered robe?

Was this the sad-eyed Pansy of the fire-light reveries?

‘Was it not like him? And so—and so I thought—they were to send it home to-day—and that is the shop——’

‘Do you want to go and see it?’ I asked, puzzled, as she paused.

‘Oh no! It is sure to be all right—it was just the very slightest alteration. But I thought it would please him so much to tell him that I wore it!’

Daylight began to dawn on me. We went to the shop; and, as she did not invite my co-operation, I waited outside whilst Pansy went in; and through the roses and lace and feathers and frippery in the window I caught a glimpse of Pansy sitting before a mirror having her hat pinned on.

In another minute she came out; but all her merriment was gone, and she looked so dignified, and such a queen of loveliness, that I felt the idle compliments die on my lips. I can’t possibly describe the hat—it seemed to me to be made of old lace and diamonds and drooping black feathers, and I know, at the side at which

I walked, there were pink flowers resting in a most enviable position on Pansy's dark hair.

'I think Saint Andrew was justified,' I ventured, very softly; for the silence was becoming irksome.

'I hope it won't rain,' Pansy answered. 'Is the polo-field far from cabs?'

'We had better take a cab now, and keep it,' I answered, roused to practical effort.

But it did not rain, and I spent the afternoon by Pansy's side, walking on the green grass behind the rows of chairs. And as we walked, and her dress brushed against me, or the lace on her parasol touched my sleeve, I found myself repeating Tennyson's lines—

'But not by thee
My steps shall be
For ever and for ever,'

—with scarcely the meaning he meant them to convey, I suppose.

And then I forgot the melancholy cadence, for Pansy elected to sit near the front, and showed great interest in the ponies, if not

in the game ; and then of course we talked of Rudyard Kipling, and how he had interpreted this for us, as well as so many other things in life. And from his polo ponies we went on to all his other writings, and the joy the first discovery of them was. Pansy, she told me, had first come upon his shorter stories, in the little blue-grey, paper-covered books, bought by chance at a bookstall. I owed my first introduction to a man who rushed into my rooms waving a copy of the 'National Observer'—the 'Scots Observer', as it was in those days,—crying 'Here's *literature*, Seton! Here's *literature*,—at last!' He was positively smacking his lips over the tang of genius. That was 'Danny Deever.'

'How strange it is to find an author,' said Pansy, 'appealing equally to all sorts and conditions of men,—all classes, all kinds—both reading men, and men who read nothing else.'

'Yes ; but how even stranger to find a poet equally popular with all generations, because usually a new poet obtains a hearing only from the younger generation. Some-

times, like Browning, he lives to find his disciples born into the world after him.'

'One can almost mark off literary history by the favourite poet of each age,—head the chapters, as they do a child's history, by the names of the reigning kings—"Scott, Byron, Tennyson, Browning".'

'No,' I objected, 'that wouldn't do, because you could not date them. You can have a Scott man with a Byronic wife, a Tennysonian daughter and a Browningite son, all at one table.'

'What a literary family!' laughed Pansy. 'And would the baby upstairs, may I ask, be reading Kipling in his cradle?'

'Strong food for infants! Nevertheless that brings us to exactly what we were saying, that he appeals to all generations as well as to all kinds of people. You will find the *Jungle Books* in every nursery as well as the *Barrack-Room Ballads* in every smoking-room.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Pansy, 'that reminds me—I meant to tell you, I thought it so very pretty—I heard a small boy, only about four years old, dragging behind his

nurse, holding her hand, in all the crowd of the chief street of Our Town the other day, and chanting in a baby treble to himself, half under his breath: "Where—ze—fi'in—fisses—play"; and as I, passing, bent down and added: "And the dawn comes up like thunder—" he looked up with a delighted smile of baby fun, and the nurse seemed quite shocked and dragged him away.'

So we chatted, and watched the game, and enjoyed the sunshine and the open air and the dresses, and spoke passing words to every one.

'I wish it were Ranelagh!' I exclaimed.

'Why? Surely this is very pretty?'

'Yes; but not so pretty as Ranelagh.' But I added to myself, 'Never the time and the place and the loved one all together'; and then, remembering that the greatest of these three is the last, I told myself I might well be content, and was able to bear it with equanimity when I found that Pansy was telling me reproachfully that the first flower-show she had ever been to had been held in

a tent in a field in their little village, and that, after she had looked forward to it for weeks, the pleasure had been utterly spoiled to her by a *blasé* boy from a military crammer's near, who had scoffed at it and told her what a real flower-show was like.

I disclaimed all connection with the *blasé* boy from the crammer's, and I asked her about their village. And, as she told me, I had a glimpse of Pansy's sweet, fenced-in youth,—her 'Queen's Garden.' I am old-fashioned enough to prefer lilies to sesame: the sesame comes all too soon to most. Let our women tend the lilies in their gardens while they may.

Pansy told me of a very simple life among the Sussex downs and commons; of the rectory garden, with the flowering trees on the lawn,—the magnolia, and the big tulip-tree, under which they had their tea-table and lived all summer; and the cypress, that turned such a beautiful red in autumn. And she told me of the church, that seemed part of her home. 'We had a private path to it,' she said, 'through a little wood

that skirted our hay-field; and we used often to run down to it before breakfast, or late in the evening, or go and sit there on hot afternoons.' She told me of the great beams across the roof of the chancel, and of the Crusader, with crossed feet, on one side of the nave, and his lady, with the folds of her skirt spread over a lion, on the other,—both their stone faces worn quite flat; and of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed and the Ten Commandments on either side of the altar, below the tablets sacred to the memory of local magnates; and of the 'Table of Affinity and Kindred' by the door, ready to catch the eyes of wooers before they joined that Communion of Saints that usually takes place in the churchyard after service. She spoke of the poor people;—she seemed to yearn over them all, now, individually. Old Adam Grey, who had such a cough every winter, and was so patient and cheerful, and had been a poacher in his youth. Old Mrs. Jennings, who had had her bit of blue sky taken away from her by the curate. 'We all knew about her bit of blue sky,' Pansy

said, with her eyes soft with tender humour, 'she often told us about it. It was the one little bit of sky she could see from her window, framed in a wealth of straggling creepers, and with the scarlet geraniums in her window-box waving their heavy heads against it. There was a dip in the meadow, and she saw her bit of blue sky through it, with the weather-cock above the square steeple of my father's church pointing up into it. It was there all the friends were whom she had lost, in that bit of heaven that she could see: her young husband, who had died years and years ago, and her only baby, and her old mother—"not so old as I am now, missie, but I still think of her as old to me,"—and all her people: she had lost all. "But they, who can walk where they will in Heaven, is it likely they would settle anywhere else but just there, knowing, as they must, it is the one bit of sky I can ever see?—and me alone here, and they all together. No; you can depend on it, Miss Pansy, they are all gathered just there, waiting for me, and God will let them have it for themselves—

it is such a small bit of sky,—He would not grudge it to me, when He knows I do not grudge Him my all He has taken. I never have my eyes off that bit of blue sky! I open them on it in the morning, and it's company to me all day, and I say my prayers to it at night." And then the new curate came,' Pansy continued, 'and I found her crying as if her heart would break, for the misguided youth had tried to explain. "He's taken my bit of blue sky from me, missie,—he's taken my bit of blue sky from me and scattered them all over Heaven, where they know I can't see them!"'

'Did you manage to re-instate her evicted relations?'

'I tried to, but the foundations of her faith had been shaken. And I think the curate was very angry with me.'

'Tell me about the others.'

She remembered them one by one, wondering what had become of them :—the girls in her sewing-class, if they had married, and whether they had left the village; the children, who must be big boys and girls now; she spoke of the little choir-boys

with whom she had taken so much trouble, —‘they always looked so sunburnt, with their ten hot little faces above different coloured ties and short surplices, contrasted with my father’s pale face behind them.’ And the babies—she even remembered the babies; and she spoke of a village dog by its name.

‘You must have been the guardian angel of the parish,’ I said.

‘No, it was my mother was that,’ she answered. And then she went on to tell me about her mother, and how the parish had worshipped her; and about the time when she lay dying, and all the village waited in hushed misery hour by hour to hear news from the stricken rectory; and how her father, on the Sunday that was her last Sunday, was obliged to take the service himself, and how he would do it all, though some one in the congregation had offered to read the Lessons for him; and how they told her afterwards,—for she had stayed at home with her mother,—that his voice had broken as he read the prayer for those ‘who are anyways afflicted, or distressed, in mind,

body, or estate; especially for those for whom our prayers——' and that suddenly the whole church was filled with sobbing,—women sobbing aloud, and men with tears running down their faces. And her father had bowed his head, and none had heard his prayer, save perhaps Him to whom it was uttered. 'And He answered it as it seemed to Him best,' Pansy added, tremulously, 'for He took my mother to Himself that very night, and we had to live on without her. How we fret against Fate! How cruel death seems,—how unnecessary! And afterwards, looking back, it is sometimes vouchsafed to us to have a glimmering of the meaning,—to see part of the mercy in it all.'

'Then you were alone with your father?'

'Yes,—for a short time. He died four years later, just a few months after my marriage.'

'They must have been a lonely four years.'

'Yes,' she said; 'my father, after my mother's death, lived much among his books; and he was changed. How did I spend my time?—oh, I used to visit our

people, and decorate the church and work things for it, and make my dresses, and read—I read a great deal. And then I went visits, sometimes. But oh, how I missed her! We had been so much together, had shared every thought. I felt as if all the love for me that there was in the world had died with her.'

So that was how Jack Fairbairn had won her—an adder among the grass. He must have come into her life during those four years, when she was neglected, miserable, hungering for love, inexperienced,—oh, the pity of it that the mother had died! I could not agree with Pansy that God's way seemed best. She, poor girl, thought only of how it had spared her mother the knowledge of her daughter's misery in her marriage: but to me it seemed as if it had left her young daughter a prey.

'I suppose an only child is always lonely,' Pansy said reflectively, pursuing her own train of thought.

I roused myself from mine. 'Yes; and I fancy a lonely childhood is a thing one never makes good through life; one is

never so much at ease with other human beings.'

Pansy glanced at me. 'And more at ease with other things to make up for that,' she suggested.

'What other things?'

'Oh, whatever has filled up one's childhood—the country, and books, and fancies. What filled your horizon during your childhood, Mr. Seton?' she asked, smiling at me.

'A burn, chiefly.'

'A *burn*?

'Yes;—a stream, I suppose you would call it in England—only you haven't got it there. A stream is quite a quiet, well-behaved, soulless thing, that meanders placidly and shallowly through a meadow, and after days of storms it never loses its self-control, but merely spreads itself out over the grass—not an inch deeper. A burn has a character: it changes with every mood. You can live beside it for a lifetime, and not grow tired of it. There is all the difference between a Scottish burn and an English stream that there is between Scottish humour and English wit.'

'Then perhaps I should not understand a burn,' said Pansy demurely, and added apologetically that the things most easily understood were certainly not the most valuable. 'Was your burn a river?—I picture a burn as a small thing.'

'The biggest things are not the most valuable,' I said severely. 'A burn comes roaring down the side of a hill, in a great hurry and a terrible fury, and then it turns sulky and swells out into a great brown pool; and then it jogs over stones, and gurgles in and out of channels, and laughs in little shallows among bright bits of quartz, and turns very humorous and sees the fun of everything; then, just as it is getting quite hilarious, it suddenly turns sentimental and sings a monotonous minor song to itself; and then it flows softly under some trees and deepens out and reflects every branch and twig, and stands quite still and makes itself into a mirror for Nature while it thinks about all the sorrow and tragedy of the world. And then something upsets it and off it goes again in a roaring rage, spitting foam and swirling

poor little sticks away, turning them round and round till they are giddy, and then flinging them quite dazed on to the bank. That was the kind of burn that was my closest companion till I went to school. There were a lot of trees on a sloping bank by a bit of it I knew best; and there were squirrels—little bright-eyed things with bushy tails; and I had a hutch of rabbits there; and there were water rats; and—oh, I hadn't a lonely childhood at all.'

We were interrupted by a sudden excitement of the ball's coming close to the boundary where we sat, followed by a flash of scampering ponies and of the bright colours of the riders, the swish of a club that missed, a suggestion of a quickly suppressed oath, the thud of a club that hit, and then a sharp reining round and they were all over the field again. Some people near us got up, and Pansy rose too, and I made a way for her through the chairs, and we walked slowly up and down.

'Where was the burn?' asked Pansy. 'I thought you were born and had lived always in Our Town?'

‘Oh yes, I was born in Our Town, and lived there nominally. But the burn was at Craigstoun, about seventeen miles away. It belonged to us.’

‘Do you mean it had belonged to you always?’

‘Oh no! My great-grandfather bought it. I am afraid all my grandfathers were younger sons. But Craigstoun was an ideal home for a boy; only my mother did not like it, and it was sold.’

‘And you were sorry, poor boy!’ she said softly.

I knew the ‘poor boy’ was addressed to a small boy no longer existent; but still the words sent a tingling through my veins. I began to think I *had* had rather a lonely childhood—it had never occurred to me before, perhaps because my manhood had been a mere continuance of the loneliness. But I felt a wave of pity for myself, and I began to tell Pansy a little about it—of my young mother’s continued ill-health, and her restlessness, and her dislike of our Scottish weather; of how she had always gone abroad whenever my father,

who loved Scotland and home, and thrived on wind and caller air, and whose idea of happiness embraced shooting-boots splashed with mire, and a horizon draped in mist,—whenever he could be persuaded to take her; and of how, as she grew more and more of an invalid, less and less persuasion was needed, until not only the winters but the summers also were spent abroad, and Craigstoun was lent to an old lady relative, and I, a little chap of eight or nine, was sent to her for the holidays, and not allowed to go near my beloved burn for fear of wetting my feet. But soon after that it was sold altogether.

‘And your mother died?’ Pansy asked.

‘My father died first; he died abroad, when I was sixteen. My mother survived him for three years; but she spent them in Italy. She never came home after his death.’

‘Did you not see her again?’

‘Oh yes! I went each summer from Harrow,—the last summer before she died it was from Cambridge. And it was from Cambridge I was telegraphed for when—at

the end. I was with her when she died. It—it was a carriage accident. I am always thankful my father was spared.'

Pansy was silent.

'It seemed so strange—he was always so strong and well,—such a regular out-of-doors man, and he so sacrificed himself for my mother's health, giving up all he was fond of—his country, his sport,—even me—he was fond of me,—and attending her like a watch-dog to all sorts of hot, gay watering-places where he had nothing to do, and could not even speak the language, and seemed so big and idle and aimless and out of place;—and then for him to die first,—to die of pneumonia, in three days. I was not with him. I remember the day I heard the news.'

I stopped speaking as I thought of it again, and still Pansy said nothing.

'I went on to Cambridge, because he had wanted it; and I came here and took out law classes, and sat in a lawyer's office, and read for the Bar, because he had wanted that. It had been a sort of tradition in our family, ever since the days when James the

Seventh, who seems to have been rather an arbitrary monarch, wrote to the Court of Session that 'For reasons best known to our selfe, wee have thought fit to remove Sir Alexander Seaton from being one of the Senators of our College of Justice.' The king did not approve of his politics,—and that may be why our politics have been immaculate ever since. He wasn't a direct ancestor; but most of my forebears have been lawyers—at least all the successful ones have. I am afraid I shan't be one of the successful ones; but it does not much matter, as I am the last. But I am boring you, Mrs. Fairbairn, talking so much about myself?' I added, suddenly noticing her continued silence.

'Oh no,' she answered, half inaudibly: and something in her voice made me turn quickly, and I saw that Pansy's eyes were lowered, and the corners of her mouth were quivering. It sent the blood singing to my head, so that the ground felt uneven below my feet, and a mist swam before my eyes.

'I—I've never had a woman to talk to, all these years,' I heard myself say.

And Pansy raised her eyes suddenly,—I was right, they were bright with tears,—and her face rippled over with sudden laughter.

‘Really?’ she said, incredulously, and glanced over towards the gay throng.

‘Not a woman I cared for, I mean!’ I blundered.

And, as I said it, Pansy’s eyes returned to me, and we looked at each other for a moment’s space. It was only for a moment. The little smile never left Pansy’s lips; but deep in her wonderful eyes, deeper than I had ever looked before, there was no smile.

It was only a moment: then she turned away.

‘Who is that elderly lady by the younger one in grey?’ she asked lightly.

‘In grey, yes,’ I repeated stupidly; and she did not notice that I had not answered, as we sauntered after the groups who were, the match being over, making their way back to the entrance.

CHAPTER X

CONSCIENCE

WHAT is conscience? I remember in my student days we were told it could not be educated; but I believe in Our Town it can be, and is. I know the symptoms of a well-educated conscience—I have watched them in others. For myself, the malady never made any progress with me. I have not led an absolutely faultless and reputable life; but, though there are a few pages of it I should be sorry to have read from the house-top, and never am morbid enough to re-read myself, yet I have walked fairly straight and have never cheated at cards; and that is as much as I expect from any man. The man who boasts he has done more must be a prig, if he isn't a liar. I don't know why temptations were put into this world if we weren't

expected to yield to them occasionally, if only to gain experience: and experience teaches Charity and Humility,—two of the cardinal virtues, I believe. We are all sinners by nature; but some of us have had more temptation than others,—

‘For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken’d—Man’s forgiveness give—and take!’

Surely the poet, with keener senses, with finer feelings, answering as sensitively to the stimuli of the world’s impressions as the little telegraph indicator answers to the flash along the wires,—with the power of idealising, and the miserable doom that ever awaits the idealist enhanced by his torturing capacity for sorrow and self-pity,—surely he must not be judged by precisely the same standards as the man who turns first to the stock exchange report when he opens his newspaper? Or the man of action, whose life is full of strong possibilities and situations, who makes all the world his stage, who is versed in all creeds and hampered by none,—is he to be judged by the same standards as the country curate on the

lawn? Were the old Sophists right, and is morality comparative? Any man,—a man, out in the world,—is he to be judged as we judge a woman? And are fiction and the drama right, and are our old standards for women becoming obsolete, and is this because our women, heaven pity them! are out in the world too, nowadays?

Bah! the very word woman has brought it back again, this, this,—what *is* it? Is it indigestion?—Or conscience? And, if so,—what the devil is conscience?

I have not seen Pansy for a week. I wonder if she will notice it. I wonder a great many things about her, and I call myself a blatant ass and I grow hot at my own conceit: and yet the thoughts will come. Over what old doorway did I once read, 'Thocht is free but Speach is thrall'? Oh, thought is very free sometimes—free of the limits that the miserable thinker tries to set, even. And conscience—Lord! what Calvinistic ancestor runs cold in my veins, and asks me the meaning of Pansy's eyes?

And then again I tell myself I was mis-

taken, and that her change of manner—for her manner has changed,—I, who know every tone of her voice and shade of her eyes, can make no mistake about that,—her manner has changed, as slightly as the first dimming of the primrose before it fades; but yet it has changed, possibly unknown to herself,—I tell myself that this change of manner is due to no thought save that I weary her. What other thought could Pansy harbour? Thought, that is so free, would yet never dare penetrate the sanctuaries of Pansy's soul. And yet my thoughts would dare fly there, and return to me picturing—bah! I am an ass. So I have stayed away a whole week and am wondering if she has noticed. Sometimes I hate myself for the feeling I cannot stifle, that I would rather have that change of manner than no change. Nothing in this world can stand still: what the physiologists call metabolism must go on everywhere,—a thing must either be building up or disintegrating, either be growing or decaying,—it cannot stand still, arrested between heaven and earth like Mahomet's

coffin. And this friendship that I had thought might continue indefinitely, a hidden volcano on my side, a fair meadow with the sweet placidity of flowers and sun and shade on hers,—it was an impossibility. It was beyond the power of human endurance that our feelings should remain stationary—*our* feelings?—ah, God! Yes, it has come to this. I had thought I could trust my strength, that I should never betray myself, never insult my queen's dignity by look or word that should reveal my secret; but what is a man's strength? I had built me a castle in the sand as children do, and now the tide is creeping on and on,—and am I alone in my castle? For Pansy's manner has changed—subtly, intensely. She has put a barrier betwixt us, and—is it fear in her eyes? And I would shield and protect her, poor little slight thing who has suffered so much,—I would endure the torments of hell gladly before a cloud should cast its shadow over her. And so I have stayed away a whole week. She must have noticed.

CHAPTER XI

AN EASTERLY HAAR

IN Our Town the mist comes suddenly up from the sea. It creeps along, a wall of chilly vapour, and drags itself over us, usually in the afternoon after a hot morning, slowly, imperceptibly, till the whole town lies in a shroud, and one shivers and shuts the window. We call it, in Our Town, an 'easterly haar,' and it always reminds me of that verse in the psalms,—'He shall come down like the rain into a fleece of wool: even as the drops that water the earth.'

It was a hot morning. Inside the Courts it was stifling, and of the judges on the Bench two were asleep, and the counsel were red in the face, and more than usually irritable.

I had been dozing and sketching in the reporters' bench, and my head was spin-

ning. When I left, I stepped out into Parliament Square into a chilly haar, and buttoned up my coat and cursed.

The whole place was as dense as my own mind. The mist did not curl and wreath, it simply lay thick on the town, obscuring everything. A kind of restlessness possessed me—I strained my eyes to peer through the veil, and ran into passers-by. The hollows of the gardens below the Castle looked like vast witches' cauldrons filled with mist: the castle above was invisible. I became possessed by a wild notion that, unless I could disperse this grey, chilling, damnable stuff, I should never disperse the hideous web that had wrapped itself round my life and was blinding my path. I walked on and on, till I found myself walking along a broad country road, to the west of Our Town, that leads straight down towards the sea. In the valley on that side of the town the mist lay over fields and hedges. There were not many others who shared my pedestrianism on such a day; though once, I think, a fellow-creature emerged gigantic through the mist and

passed again. Still I walked on, a vague longing possessing me to see the sea, and hear the waves, and let their ceaseless trouble bring some message to mine. I passed through the rough streets of a little village, and under an arch, and before me loomed the great crooked breakwater, leading out into the mist. And still I went on, till I stood facing the greyness of a mist that had only the greyness of sea beneath it.

How one goes on in life, pacing through unseen dangers, seeing only the little hand's-breadth round one's petty self, magnifying the importance of those few objects in the little space,—on and on, with the mountains and the sky all hidden,—only the stones below one's feet seen, and the little ambition not to stumble so all-absorbing that we live for it alone,—write our poems to it, preach our sermons about it, and think that the stones below our feet are the world. And then suddenly there are no stones—only the grey, mysterious, awful sea, with the mist rising from it, floating on it, mixing with it. . . .

Back and forward I looked on the breakwater—nothing but the grey mist, the grey stones, and, where the grey stones ended,—

O Pansy, Pansy darling! I love you! I cannot help it—life is so short, and we know so little! My life was a barren wilderness till you came; and yours—I cannot bear to think what yours was. And now, if this be not God, if this be something evil,—then Satan has come to us in the semblance of his Master. O Pansy, you touched me like sunshine, and, if my whole soul has blossomed into love for you in response, are the blossoms wrong, and to be ruthlessly cut down? Is there nothing before us,—you and me, dear,—but the weird, terrible, relentless sea in her shroud? O Pansy, never, through selfishness of mine, shall the icy waters meet over your dear dark head! This madness will pass. If you care for me—I read it in your eyes—I must go. I will see you again—once—and—no! I will not see you. I will go: you will understand.

I turned and walked home, shivering and burning by turns. The haar was lifting, I thought. Then suddenly I found it was growing dark. Why, of course, it was evening. Then I was at my own door. . . .

My old housekeeper said it was influenza, due to the easterly haar, and to my having kept on my wet things after I came home, and to my having taken no food all day; and the doctor, whom she sent for, as it seemed to me in the middle of the night, and without asking me, agreed with her. I listened without heeding. I know I was in a fever, and that I wrote a long poem all night in my sleep, if sleep it was that their drugs brought me, and was restlessly anxious to wake again in order to commit it to paper. It was so long, and, though I kept repeating it and repeating it, I knew I should forget it when I woke. And so it happened. Alas! my poem, my epic, my masterpiece, had vanished. I felt it slipping from me as I regained consciousness, and I tried not to wake, clutching in speechless agony at the tails

of my verses as they melted away in my fingers.

And so I woke, feeling strangely weak and tired, as if I had been fighting a foe,—which indeed I had,—and with a strange depression weighing upon me, a strange listlessness, that prevented my even questioning the cause of the depression. Life, and all it offered, seemed far off, and I had no desire to begin it all again, or even think of it: I wanted to rest. So I lay, looking at the pattern on the wall, accepting the ministrations of my old housekeeper, answering the doctor's questions, wondering why people took so much trouble about things that did not matter and lasted such a short time. And then I dozed, and dreamed my poem again; and this time I retained two verses of it when I woke, and the critical faculty that was regained in waking showed me they did not match in metre:—

If life held only this, dear, only this,
Though all the world applauded,
You and I, dear,—I and you,—
We'd feel defrauded!

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But this could not have been part of the same,—and yet I remember it as the finale :—

What's amiss?
Men are so silly!
Put a light to the unlit fire—
The night's grown chilly.
And after the fire?—
Ashes! Ah, well,—
There's room for two more yet
In Dante's hell.

I said the verses over to myself. I could not remember what the poem had been about. There had been a vast deal between the two fragments, but they were the sole survivors. They were a message from dreamland.

And now I felt a sudden unaccountable desire for action. I felt as if things were happening, as if the world were moving on and leaving me behind. I felt as if everything were urging me towards something, I did not know what. Mysterious spirits hurried past me, flapping me with their robes as they went, bending to whisper a message which I strained my ears in vain to catch, pausing and looking into my eyes

with a warning—a meaning—a reproach. I told myself I was still feverish and had better keep quiet; but I could not. And then suddenly all the restlessness concentrated itself into an unconquerable longing to see Pansy again, and the sweet serenity of her image seemed to exorcise the troubled spirits, and clear my clouded brain. Was it years since I had left her? I saw her face, distinctly, suddenly, and she seemed to be imploring my help. Then I remembered how easy it was to see her—I could be with her in a moment. Nothing kept us apart save my own stupid ideas. What was it that had roused this madness in me? Was it the one look in Pansy's eyes, or was it the slow conviction of the last few months, suddenly and consciously realised? Well, any way, I must go to her. It should all be the same—I should hear her dear low voice and see her dear face. Why had I denied myself? I must go—I could fight no longer. What is conscience? The key that fools forge to lock the door between themselves and happiness.

I managed to dress myself, trembling, half from weakness and half from excitement, ashamed of my lack of strength ; and I stole out of my house and reached the next doorsteps and rang the bell.

‘Is Mrs. Fairbairn in?’ I asked, as I had asked a hundred times before.

‘No, sir,’—the man looked at me curiously, ‘did you not know? She and the master are gone.’

‘Gone, Lauder?’

‘Yes, sir ; they left two days ago.’ The old servant looked round, and then he lowered his voice.

‘The young master—Mr. Jack, sir,—is ill. They have gone to him.’

I turned away from the familiar door. I knew now that I had known it all the time. Fate never stands still.

CHAPTER XII

TWO QUEENS

I WENT over to Paris for a week or two, for my neglected influenza had left me weak and irritable and unfit for work, and the Courts had risen. It was there that I received Christopher Fairbairn's letter, dated from Weymouth, and read it in the little court-yard at the back of my hotel, sitting smoking by a dingy tub with some senseless vegetable growing in it.

'My dear Gavin Seton,' his letter ran, written in his neat, tremulous, precise little handwriting; 'My daughter and I feel we owe you an apology for the somewhat unneighbourly abruptness of the departure we were constrained to make. I know I can rely on your tried friendship of many years towards myself, and of the last year toward my dear daughter also, and that I

shall not tax your kindness when I venture to presuppose a continuance of the interest you have always evinced in what concerns us. My son, who has been separated from us for so long, is very ill. We learned it suddenly, and also that it was possible for us to go to him. My immediate thought and only intention was to go alone; but my noble-hearted daughter at once expressed her intention of not leaving me. It was all very hurried; so in your courtesy you will forgive my neglect in sending you no message of good-bye. Indeed, Seton, you have been with me so often, and have understood so much, ever meeting me with such ready tact, that I should have been not sorry to have had your opinion in the matter—whether I was justified in allowing her. Nevertheless it was perhaps out of our hands: in these matters women cannot be led. Their instincts are often better—always purer—than our reason. Ah, Seton, Seton! Now, when I have seen her with him, I bow my head. And I too wronged her, before I knew her, fancying she might have been stronger, might have been kinder,

—I,—who was I to judge her?—to lay faults at her door?—when she, who might have justly laid it all at mine, came to me as a tired bird might seek its nest : came to me, and blessed my old age, as it had not promised to be blessed.

‘Am I in any way to blame for this young creature’s stricken life? Though this last that has happened has made my wounds bleed afresh and my cup of bitterness to overflow, yet it seems as if now I were dulled to sorrow ; for I am an old man, and all things seem afar off, and the Mercy Seat seems very near. I am content to await His judgment. But Pansy is young, and what pierces me most is her tenderness and reticence, and even gratitude, to me, my poor little lassie. Ah, we are told that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and it seems a hard judgment ; but truly I think more often it is the sins of the children that are visited upon the fathers.

‘But I am doubtless wearying you with my havers, as I have doubtless wearied you often before, by my study fire. May I ask you, in your neighbourly kindness,—’ And

then followed a few trivial requests, put forward with many apologies, regarding some papers and their destination, and other matters; and the letter ended with 'my daughter's best regards,' and his small, legible signature.

I folded the sheet up, and sauntered through the hotel and out into the historic streets of Paris.

It was all very hazy;—Weymouth—Weymouth! O little delicate Pansy! Why did not the lightning descend and kill him when he stood with you before God's altar, or the earth open and swallow him up, a feast for the worms! I felt that he would live—I knew that he would live! Live, with this woman-soul chained to him, writhing, agonised,—as the living were chained to the dead. Yes, Jack Fairbairn would live.

The hot Paris day was over, and the light-hearted Paris evening had begun. The clustered chairs outside the cafés stretched right across the streets, and the clear, thin, brisk air was permeated with a variety of odours, of which the most familiar

was tobacco. I sat down by a little table somewhere—I forget where—I think it was in one of the poorer streets. I know the wine they brought me was execrable, and remained undrunk beside me ; but it served its purpose of an excuse for my remaining there, smoking my own British cigarettes, and idly watching the passers-by, with a strange feeling of outsidersness to everything, as if I were already dead, and watching my brethren, who would not hearken to Moses and the prophets, and so were little likely to hearken even if one returned from the dead to warn them. To warn them—to warn them of what? That we need not to wait for the next world in which to feel hell-fire : it exists in this. Its thin, blue flames leap and coil round us wherever we go ; and, when the prospect is fairest and calmest, suddenly dart out and lick up the sap of our lives, and leave us withered and blasted.

The streets grew darker and the air chilly ; the lamps were lit ; more and more chairs were brought out, till they stretched right across the roadway, and the waiters

flew about busily. I got up and walked away, and my aimless steps presently led me to the Place de la Concorde. After the noisy and bourgeois life of the streets I had left, the great open space was soothing. I paused by the obelisk in the centre, where the guillotine had stood, and looked round me, at the gardens of the Tuileries, at the broad avenues stretching away, with their lit-up theatres dotted here and there, and the high groups of statuary and the fountains. The whole scene was lit up brilliantly with the strange effect of a mixture of lights,—the white glare of the electric lights mingling somehow with lamp-light; and, high above all, poised almost theatrically over the Arc de Triomphe, a pale half-moon hanging in the untroubled French sky. The idling crowds passed this way and that, walking gaily over the grave of tragedy: for where I stood a Queen had suffered martyrdom. Driven here through the howling mob, her little hands tied behind her, Marie Antoinette had given that one glance down to the Tuileries in passing,—her mind for that instant back

again in the brilliant past, far from the raging beasts round the tumbril, far from the long, squalid misery of all her prison life, far from the shameful death awaiting her. A queen's sorrow—past, recorded: and the world grown older. A queen's tears and agony and heroic endurance become history, facts to be taught in schools; but they were real in her woman's heart, they were all the world to her, blotting out infinity to her wan vision. The tragic memories of this gay Paris!—The moonlight above and the lamplight below, and under all the brilliance of the unthinking city the sorrow of the dead queen. And then I thought of another woman's sorrow,—my queen, who was suffering even now,—and of the little sensitive, delicate face,—so dear to me!—and the agony darkening her dear dark eyes. What tortured me most was my helplessness.

Meanwhile, I would carry my useless hulk back home to my work again, and take up my life. It was the only course that would keep me ready if the moment should come when I could be of use to her.

How respectable Our Town looked as I rattled in a cab from the railway station! How coldly and formally the great blocks of houses looked at me from the corners of the stately squares! There were the symbolic lamps before the Lord Provost's door—there is a Newhaven fishwife resting her creel. How familiar the names above the shops, the empty gardens through the dingy iron railings! I have suddenly grown old in Our Town. It held Pansy for a while, but it could not keep her—it let her go again, poor, tired, broken bird. And how respectable and complacent it looked, in its grey inhospitality!

I took a curious pleasure in executing old Fairbairn's commissions, and writing to him about them. I had already sent him a short note from Paris, and now I could write again. I could not mention all that he had written to me about, beyond thanking him for what he had said regarding his belief in my friendship, and telling him I esteemed his as an honour. I knew he would understand. And in both my letters I sent my best regards to his daughter,

Mrs. Fairbairn. I had no answer to my Paris letter; but to the other one from Our Town I had a very short reply to thank me for what I had done, and to tell me that his son was gradually regaining strength. There was no message from Pansy.

And so I went back to my old life, the tall house next door tenantless; the life I had led before Pansy came, the people I had known and lived among before she came,—everything the same, with only the addition of a memory—but what an addition!—‘Remembrance fallen from Heaven.’

CHAPTER XIII

TEN YEARS' IDLING

IT was chiefly the desire to attend to Christopher Fairbairn's requests, and a kind of grim longing to get back into harness, that made me return to Our Town, for the Courts were still up, and a summer warmth had penetrated into the grey streets, taking the chilliness off the stony pavements, and productive of a kind of general glare without any actual sunshine to account for it. Above, the sky was a far-off sky, pale grey-blue, flecked with dappled white clouds, with an over-mantle of a few dark dove-grey ones, that hid the sun, and only now and then let it peep through. Into the dappled sky rose the many steeples of Our Town, clear as Indian ink drawings; and the smoke rose straight from the chimneys and mingled with the nearer clouds.

The orthodox things for a man to do when circumstances—which is usually another name for woman—play havoc with his life, are to go after big game in far-off lands if he be of a stout heart; or to commit suicide, either moral or physical, if he be poor-spirited. At least, that is what they do in novels. Somehow I lacked the desire for either kind of suicide, and I had not the energy to travel. I felt dazed and weary. The sudden breaking-up of the ground under my feet had come too abruptly after the realisation of what ground I was standing on. Or it may have been the influenza. Or it may have been that I was alone,—there was no friend to administer the moral shake and bid me begone. Or perhaps, if I had possessed a valet to pack my box and clean my gun, the course of my life might have been changed. As it was, when my old house-keeper came to me for orders, I told her I would dine at the club, and I wandered about all day amid the deafening rattle of the wheels on our hard stone-paved streets, and watched the smoke ascending, a dirty

grey against the clean grey of the sky, or blue against the dark grey of a steeple, and wondered what the world was for, and if there were blue sky and golden sunshine anywhere in it, instead of this glare below a grey sky and above a grey town; and if our fleeting sojourn between an unknown past and an unknown future were worth all the trouble we take about it,—building our houses, planning our empires,—sowing for others to reap, and planting for others to gather. And I looked at the people who passed me by in the streets,—here a dainty lady, elaborate, conscious,—conscious of her dress and her self, and nothing beyond. Then two busy men, stout and prosperous, talking with energy: I overheard a fragment as I passed. ‘What *I* want to know,’ one said, ‘is—how it will affect *us*?’ Probably the Budget. A whistling message-boy with a basket containing a slice of fish and a piece of ice; a slatternly maid-servant with an idle broom, peeping over an area gate. Were all these people blind? Did they realise, as they spent day after day in detail, what was awaiting them in the midst

of life? And then I happened to glance down at my shoes, and I remembered how put out I had been that very morning because they had not been properly polished; and I smiled grimly. Yes, all is for the best: we cannot live above concert-pitch. We read tragedies in our papers every morning, and yet the suffering cat that seeks refuge in our coal-cellar awakes a more living pity than the accounts of famine and disease and accident and crime; and to-morrow's social duty weighs on our spirits more than next year's death. Yes, it is all for the best. And then the sun came half out,—merely a lightness in a break among the gathering clouds, but enough to make everything seem worth while again, and our threescore years and ten a generous span,—and there was work to be done in the world, and there was work all round us that had been done in it—splendid work, work that thrilled one's nerves to hear of; and whatever work had been done, men had done it. Our streets and our cities, our conquests and our empires, all the 'fairy tales of science and

the long results of time'—achieved by men. And so, before the sun went behind the clouds again, I had acknowledged myself heir to all the ages, and hungry at that, and I turned into the club for luncheon.

For Pansy was alive—at any moment, like the sun, she might come from behind the cloud and transform the world to me. She was alive; and nothing is real separation except Death. Till we know the separation Death can bring, we imagine a thousand little obstacles to be separations, and wail and fret and clamour at them. But when we know the inevitableness of Death,—when we know what it is to dream the familiar presence back and hear the familiar voice, and wonder, in our dream, that we had suspected a wrong—a sorrow—something terrible—what was it?—and then to wake, wake in the half light of morning, and remember,—remember that the one has been taken and the other left, and that there is silence. Oh, that silence! Whoever has chafed against that silence which is the legacy of Death, has known the full misery of life.

But Pansy was alive. The same world held us both. I could look at the green, waving country, and feel the joy of life, and know she too was breathing the soft, scented summer. I could look at the stars, and not have to crave a sign from their eternity, but know she was safe in this familiar planet,—human, loving, living! But it was hard, all the same, for life is short. And then I began to feel that, if I wanted to stop mooning till my head was as grey as Our Town and my brains as dusty and my heart as cold, I must find something to do, and do it with all my strength and with all my might.

How quickly ten years had gone! Ten years ago, when I was called to the Bar, I had considered myself a man, with most of the wild follies of my youth behind me, and the serious work of the world ahead. And now,—well, in some things I was younger now than I had been then. I have no doubt I was a consequential ass in those days, taking everything, myself and my sins included, with vast seriousness. Now I was an easy, indolent failure. Yes, a

failure, as far as my profession went. A small income has often ruined a man before ; and when it is combined with a love of leisure and a love of literature it is damning to the last degree. Ten years' idling is hard to make good. For ten years the Second Division of the Inner House has known me as a frequent occupant of the Reporters' Bench : I have seventeen small sketch-books full of caricatures to show for that. Oh, and to do myself justice, I have given a reporter a hand occasionally. And the sketches aren't bad. I have spent a good deal of time, too, in the Jury Court. It is an interesting place—intensely human. But I have spent much more time in the vaults under Parliament House, happy and dusty among the old manuscripts. They have made me a Curator of the Advocates' Library because they noticed I was partial to dust. Is that all I have done in the last ten years? I feel a veritable Tomlinson :

“Ye have read, ye have heard, ye have thought,” he said, “and the tale is yet to run :

By the worth of the body that once ye had, give answer—what ha' ye done?”

I wondered if the devil were enough of a lawyer to understand if I told him that I had more than once been appointed Commissioner in applications for the Recovery of Documents? Probably he would be ; and would know enough of Adam's breed to tell me that I did not owe that sin to myself, but to the fact of my family interest in Our Town. And I have been polling sheriff at elections—but not for some years. And I have attended Glasgow Circuit, for my sins. And—no, there is nothing else. That, a few grey hairs, and a green book of poems published with a jealous and guarded anonymity that their utter lack of sale made appear crushingly ridiculous,—that is all I have to show for the best ten years of my life. The best? Ah no! I utterly despise the man I was before I knew her. And now, though she has gone out of my life, she rules it absolutely. And she has not gone into his life—she has only gone, poor child, to her duty. She has gone, I take it, more for the old man's sake than for his ;—and I remembered how she had looked as she had stood behind Saint Andrew's

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chair once, stroking his white head softly, tenderly. She has gone with him ; the son and husband has the power to claim them both, and I—am helpless as any stranger.

But some day—some day—God strengthen me! As long as this world holds us both, I shall never despair.

CHAPTER XIV

SIR JOHN MACMILLAN

—Two years ago, now : and in some ways it seems more. Two years since that year I had influenza, and went to Paris. Seven hundred and thirty days.

It has been uphill work, these two years, trying to regain ground. But I think I have found a level at last, even if it is not a particularly flower-decked meadow, nor one that commands very extensive views. It was that Inverwhinny salmon case that gave me my first lift, because it came from Dunbar and Fraser. I owed that entirely—I speak below my breath—to old Sir John Macmillan, for I am as certain as I am of anything in this contrary world that he put in a good word for me with Dunbar and Fraser. I remember I chafed a little inwardly—

being still encumbered with some of the delicately tinted and cruelly brittle ideals of youth—that I owed my promotion, not to honest worth, but to the old story of my position in Our Town, the traditional repute of my name, the local dignity of my ancestry,—all as good as when my father left them to me—and my mother too, for she was a daughter of Our Town—but, I say it to my shame,—no better. Will it be better by the time I leave it to my son?—My *son* . . . my . . . God! How the old wound wakes and smarts!

What was it that old bore Lindsay up at the Castle was telling me yesterday about his bones? That, ever since he had the fever in the East, thirty years ago now, the east wind can suddenly start the very devil in them, and no physician can exorcise it. Thirty years! Nearly all my time over again! As long as since I was a little chap of six fishing in the burn at home. Does not an All Merciful God commute a life-sentence after years of good conduct and apparent repentance?

Yes, it was that Inverwhinny salmon case did it. The good old days of the Bar, the days that every one knows about and reads about and associates with Our Town, the days that the uninitiated fondly imagine still exist, just as they imagine the days of plain living and high thinking are still among us,—those romantic days are no more. Now, if a man wants to work, he must take off his coat. Lord, how I slaved when I was working up that salmon case! I think both Sir John and Dunbar and Fraser were won by that; they have said as much since, and they have proved it. But I knew that was only half the battle, and that unless, when I got to court, I could make something of my opening speech, I should be left pretty much where I was. It gives a Junior a great pull in Scotland that the opening falls to him, and many a Junior who has laid the foundations of a good business by a brilliant opening speech has had cause to bless the system. I was as nervous over that speech of mine—for I knew much depended on it—as a Presbyterian father

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at a christening, when the baby in his unaccustomed arms wriggles and squeaks; but—well, the baby was christened.

What a fine man Sir John Macmillan is! To be with him is like drinking a generous, full-flavoured wine. If I were a little younger, with some of the enthusiasm of youth left me, I feel I might be guilty of hero-worshipping Sir John as a type of worldly success. His very appearance warms your heart on a cold day. Any one belonging to Our Town would be able to tell at once that he is one of our Senior Bar; for there is a certain type of firmly set mouth and chin which, combined with a little heavy modelling in the lines of the face, is unmistakable. Sir John Macmillan is a familiar figure in the streets of Our Town. He is inclining to stoutness now, but carries himself well, with a certain characteristic uplifting of square chin and square shoulders; well-dressed, yet with a suggestion of disregard for dress; his complexion, a pale brick red,—not flushed, just the healthy colour of the skin, suiting well with his crinkly iron-grey

hair, and his alert, friendly eyes. His is a face that any one would glance at a second time; for, though he carries the sense of prosperity with him, yet his physiognomy proclaims this same prosperity to be the outcome of success in one of the higher walks in life;—yet a worldly success, I am afraid it must be, Sir John! There is nothing of the visionary about you, any more than there is anything of the smug or purse-proud. You are no dreamer of dreams nor seer of visions; you look what you are,—a prosperous, brilliant, cultivated man of the world; self-assured; accustomed to the confident assumption of large responsibilities and the careless acceptance of ease and consideration; a man humorously and sarcastically tolerant of his fellow-creatures, but with, perhaps, more of liking than of respect for them. For of a lawyer in large general practice may also it not be said with truth—‘unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid’?

Yes, I admire you heartily, Sir John:

you are the first man to whom I would go in any difficulty that could be told by daylight, and did not involve the discussion of religion—one's own religion, that is—or of what things are allied to one's own religion in one's own mind. I went to Sir John two years ago when I was in a difficulty ;—or rather, bless him, he came to me, after I had let fall some vague remark about serious effort. He talked to me about my father, I remember, whom he had of course known, and also a good deal about a brother of my mother's who had died in boyhood, and with whom he had been friends. 'I remember your mother's singing,' he said, 'a lovely girl she was; and a rich contralto voice she had, that roused the soul of a man—and I had a soul in those days.'

But my mother could not have been his first love, or at any rate it must have been a very fleeting fancy, for he had forgotten her Christian name and went wrong as to her age, calling her nineteen or twenty at the time of her brother's death, when she must have been a mere girl of fourteen.

Nevertheless, whatever his reasons were, he was very good to me.

'It's a pity you have not had a commercial upbringing and the benefit of a large connection with trade, Seton,' he said once. 'It's hardly in your line.'

'I'm afraid it isn't. Why?'

'Then you could have made shipping your specialty. "Those who go down to the sea in ships, and make their business on the great waters"—very lucrative business it often proves to every one concerned.'

But I could see he was only talking while he was thinking of something else, as is his way; for, though shipping is about the only specialty our law-courts are big enough to contain, it does not amount to much. Any way, it was out of my line.

'You are a Conservative, of course?' he asked me.

'I suppose I should call myself that if I called myself anything,' I told him; 'but I have never felt drawn into personal interest in party politics.'

'Quite right! A man should never stamp himself irrevocably till he knows exactly what he wants to do. I'm not at all sure that, if one does go in for political life, it doesn't answer best at the present moment to be on the other side. There are plenty of men to run Primrose meetings; but there aren't so many who are Conservatives and look it and behave it and yet call themselves Liberals. It gives a man a great pull in some directions, but still it shuts him out—like not smoking. But politics plays the deuce with a man's getting on in his profession—like literature. I'm afraid the only way for a man to build up a business is for him to go about looking very hungrily in earnest, and as if he wanted work, and it is difficult to do that, because it is impossible. What you *really* want is not work but a holiday, Seton,' he added suddenly.

'I have been taking one ever since I left Cambridge, sir,' I answered him, dully.

I remember he gave me one of his keen looks.

‘Well, you shouldn’t wear pale grey clothes, and carry your stick behind your back as if your spine wanted support, and look as if you had seen a ghost,’ he objected.

‘I have seen several.’

He shook his head. ‘Not at your age. Go and fish.’ But the fish came to me—the Inverwhinny salmon case. I think—nay, I am sure—it was Sir John who said a word to Dunbar and Fraser.

I never fancy Sir John can have much comfort in his own home, though it is one of the most brilliant in Our Town. He told me once that, during the twenty-four years he had been married, he and his wife had not dined alone together above half a dozen times—they had always either dined out or had friends with them. He might have added that *he* has dined alone often, for when he has a great case on I have known him vanish to his place up in the North for a week or so, taking only a portmanteau of papers with him. Lady Macmillan is like a withered Aubrey Beardsley woman,—cruelly thin, with no

backbone at all, and a figure comprising several snake-like curves, a head habitually slightly on one side, as if she suffered from a permanent crick in the neck, elaborate grey hair, a hard, handsome, powdered face, and a still harder voice with no resonance in it. She makes an admirable hostess; and I fancy Sir John, poor man, thinks that, in his position, wife and hostess are synonymous. His attitude towards her is no doubt the same as his attitude towards Society at large—he expects little. If she offered him more—who knows?—she might perhaps find her brilliant husband wanting. But Lady Macmillan doesn't indulge in spiritual yearnings, I fancy. That they have no children does not seem to trouble her, though Sir John himself openly laments having no heir.

It was Sir John who advised me to go out more. 'The man who does the best work is the man who can do with the least sleep,' I have often heard him say. 'And you ought to marry, Seton,' he told me once; 'no man has the moral right to

take such an advantage over his fellow men as remaining single gives him.'

Did I begin by saying that, if I were younger, I might be guilty of hero-worship for Sir John? I think I was mistaken in that. When I was young it was a different type of mind that I admired: I suppose we all demand the ideal in our youth. It is part of the character I have acquired since youth that rises up to recognise what is admirable in Sir John,—the worldly side of my nature. It is good to have a worldly side to one's nature, just as it is good to have a vigorous body as well as a healthy soul. I never approve of pampering the soul at the expense of the body; it seems to me quite as immoral as pampering the body at the expense of the soul. Renunciation,—the giving up, the closing of one's sympathies to,—a single one of the pleasures and beauties and sensations of the world, is to me like throwing God's gifts back to Him, and wasting the education He has set for us. For, if a man does not love the pleasures and beauties that he has seen, how much less will he love

the pleasures and beauties that he has not seen. After all, Plato's hierarchy holds good—we must proceed from the beauty of objects to the beauty of ideas; and for a mind to try to grasp the Idea of Beauty without having first humbly trained itself by realising the beauty of objects, is like a man's trying to paint a great picture without having learned to draw.

A student of Ruskin pointed out to me, in passing, a church in Our Town that seems to illustrate this. It is in a large and busy street within a stone's-throw of the very centre of Our Town, but extending towards one of its less fashionable quarters. It is a long stone building without any attempt at architectural beauty, built a few feet back from the street, surrounded by an iron railing with padlocked gates opposite to painted wooden doors. The plain glass windows are often sadly in need of cleaning, and through the centre one can usually be seen a long iron pitcher, painted white—no doubt a useful utensil where the fetching of water is concerned. The space between the railings and the

church is naturally, Our Town being both windy and dusty, filled with dirt and torn paper, and its sole decorations are the black notice-board with the hours of services, and boot-scrapers at the entrance. And yet this church is the centre of active Christian effort and good earnest work, is Sunday after Sunday resorted to by many for guidance and help, is the home of their spiritual food, and the place in which the beauty of Holiness is taught them. Surely the perspective is wrong? At any rate it would not be a very decided step towards Rome if the iron pitcher were to be put out of sight.

CHAPTER XV

CRAIGSTOUN

WHEN I saw our old home, Craigstoun, advertised as being to let, a curious fancy possessed me to see it again before I went to Italy. It was sold when I was at Harrow, and for five years previously my people had never been to it—'the misty summer of the North' had not suited my mother's failing health any more than its lengthened winters had done for many a year past; and so the old house, about seventeen miles south-west of Our Town, had been lent indefinitely to an impecunious spinster relative who was supposed to keep it dry and aired, whilst the old gardener tended the gardens and green-houses and sold the fruit and flowers. My father had been fond of the place—it had been ours for about a century, having been

bought by my great-grandfather, Colonel Alexander Seton, who was the seventh son of the old stock, after he had returned from India, where he had made a respectable fortune. It was his son, my grandfather, who added to the place; and who, when he was raised to the Bench, took the name Lord Craigstoun, to prevent confusion. As for me, I was attached to Craigstoun too; for, though I was but eight years old the last summer we spent there as a family, yet I remembered that summer vividly. For one thing, it was the last summer we all spent together. After that my parents were almost entirely abroad, and I used to be sent to the old relative at the dismantled Craigstoun, who must have loathed the incursion of a small boy in knickerbockers, with his pockets full of frogs and chocolate and string and worms and other treasures, as much as I loathed her, poor old lady, for keeping me indoors on wet days and giving me such small helpings at dinner. And then I was sometimes sent, without reason, as it seemed to me, to stay with friends I had

never seen or heard of before,—boarded, I now see it must have been, with kindly ministers' wives in healthy country places; and, when I grew too old for that, I was allowed to visit among my schoolfellows, or sent for, when an escort was forthcoming, to Brussels, to Berlin, to Switzerland, to the Italian lakes, to Cannes,—and taken to all sorts of horrid hot places where I had nothing to do and could not speak the language. And I used often, sitting under the glare of a foreign sun, scoffing with true British boy's prejudice at the dress and pastimes of the boys of my own age on the sands at Trouville or in the gardens at Homburg, to think longingly of the burn at Craigstoun, and the cold days and the minnows and the mud. Indeed, the burn *was* Craigstoun to me: I could not recall much of the house—the burn and the big stable-yard I recollected perfectly. So, when I saw it was to be sold, I had a sudden impulse to see the old place again, for I had never gone near it, half from sentiment and half from laziness, since it had fallen into the

hands of strangers. My father, dead these twenty years, had loved it, and had given it up loyally, and all the Scottish associations and surroundings so dear to his heart, to follow my poor delicate mother about whither she listed. And, after all, it was my father who went first; he was spared the anguish of the cruel death of the wife who was so dear to him—dearer than everything else, I sometimes think.

I would go back and look at the place, and the burn, and the stable-yard,—I would see my old home again, my childhood's paradise, before I started for Italy. I would see the place that belonged to the time before I dreamed,—and then I would go to Italy and bury my dreams.

So one day I went to where they advertised that 'particulars' were to be obtained, and found myself in a kind of coal agency, and a very youthful clerk informed me that the estate and mansion-house of Craigstoun was a most desirable property, comprising seven and a half acres, part of which was arable. There was fishing in the burn that flowed through the property—('minnows,'

I murmured). The mansion-house contained four public and ten bedrooms, and was beautifully situated on a slightly rising ground, and commanded extensive views. There was a walled garden and stabling for a dozen horses—('we only had two, and my grey pony,' I objected, under my breath). There were coach-houses, out-houses, dairy, laundry, milk-house—('yes, that's the stable-yard,' I ejaculated).

'How many acres did you say?' I interrupted him aloud.

'Seven and a half, sir,' he told me, running his finger up the book whence he was culling all this information for my benefit.

'But it used to be three times that!'

He looked a little hurt; and then, at a whispered hint from another clerk, he informed me there was a map of the property, and went to fetch it.

Yes, there it was, unrolled for my inspection. I remembered the lie of the house now, and the sweep of the drive and the two lodges. Alas, the boundaries of the present property were marked by the inner gates,—the gates on which I used to

swing, waiting for my parents' return from town. The lodges were a mile or so beyond, in either direction; but all the land had been sold away from the house.

'Has it been *built* on?' I asked in horror, and was assured not. But there were oil-works,—oh, far away from the house, he believed. And the land to the east was all farmed: yes, the farm had been a tenant farm; but at the expiry of the lease it had been found desirable to sell it separately. The present property was seven and a half acres: would I wish to see it?

Yes, I would wish to see it. And the 'upset price,' which I had forgotten to ask, but which the more businesslike clerk volunteered, struck me as extraordinarily small. Well, it was six miles from the nearest railway station—in our time there was no railway, it was a matter of driving from town;—but still there seemed something amiss. Probably the drainage was all wrong and the house out of repair; and those oil-works did not sound nice neighbours.

‘Who owns it now?’ I asked, and was told Mr. Smith did. That did not convey much to my mind, and I suppose my face said so, for the clerk added, ‘Mr. Smith of Smith and Hudson, Limited.’

So that explained the oil-works; the whole place belonged to them and to oil, and the mansion-house, as they called it, was in the way, and was to be sold, with its cropped policies.

‘Have they had it ever since—ever since Mr. Seton sold it, do you know?’

‘Seton?—Seton? I don’t know that name; but Mr. Smith has owned it for a very long time—upwards of nine years.’

‘Ah! this was upwards of twenty years ago.’ I felt antediluvian.

‘Oh, I know nothing of twenty years ago!’

This was obvious in the face of it; so I demanded an order to view the house.

The following Monday—our off-day—I pumped up my tyres, looked to my lamp, and cycled through Our Town,—up the steep hill to our much-boasted-of chief street, across its broad wooden surface,

so grateful after the stones, past the single row of huge shops with their enormous windows and bright flashes of colour, past the orderly, well-dressed crowd thronging the pavement, on to the other side where the rows of cabs hid the green of the well-kept gardens from my sight; on, under the shadow of our Castle, and off up the crowded thoroughfare where the blind man sits with his patient dog beside him, and De Quincey lies buried in God's-acre beyond the railings; on, past the headquarters of the Military Staff, and then for a mile past endless cable cars and heavy traffic, dust and noise, flaming theatrical announcements and advertisement hoardings, endless small shops displaying the necessities of life but not its luxuries, and labelling each article eagerly with its price; past a Board School in a depressingly ugly yard; past a high-walled cemetery; past news-shops with their many news-boards; past the Salvation Army 'Barracks'; past churches,—churches everywhere,—a church at every street corner, some thin red brick, some thick grey stone,

some ready-built, some in process of building,—large churches, most of them. And then another mile of 'long unlovely street', of little dwelling-houses intermingled with shops, till at last the dwelling-houses predominated,—little homes with lace curtains and front garden plots, and little homes with lace curtains, but no front garden plots; big brass plates and small brass plates, lower middle-class life, perambulators, domesticity and respectability. And then the houses grew larger, and the garden plots became walled-in half acres, whence whiffs of wallflower and lilac came gratefully blown to one, like an instant's share of happy home life and contentment. And then the tramway lines, which had been with me all the way, terminated, where two pairs of dejected horses stood at the corner, with drooping heads and harness hanging loosely on them;—and at last my cycle ran over smooth ground, and I left Our Town and its suburbs behind me, and faced the everlasting hills.

Oh, the glamour of the country! The clear open space for the eye to wander

over; the busy bird-life going on in the hedgerows that lie between the deserted road and the sweet, earth-smelling field! And this country, round about Our Town, is to me the most beautiful on earth. There is no very hot sunshine, that makes of the country a thing of a season, and then leaves it a parched wilderness, like a fair woman who is left faded and wrinkled and worn out while she is yet young in years. No, our country is beautiful all the year round, like some sweet and gracious woman whose girlhood is a faint spring dream of promise, whose youth passes imperceptibly to maturity and ripens into a still richer beauty of autumn, and so to the grace and purity of white winterhood.

I think I like our country best, perhaps, in November, when the trees are bare, and the patches of beech in the hazel hedges are brown and glorious, and a low mist hangs over the hills, and everything smells fresh and 'caller.' But it was spring when I cycled through all the lovely land that lies between Our Town and Craigstoun, and in the fields the grain was beginning to

send its tender blades up through the heavy, caked earth, and the fields were shot green and brown; and the trees were all a fresh young green,—all save the dilatory ash-trees,—and the black, feathery shields lay thick in the path under the beech-trees; and, where the road was leafiest, and the branches met over my head, I looked up at midday when the sun was hottest, and thought of Swinburne's—

‘ You came, and the sun came after,
And the green grew golden above,
And the meadow-sweet shook with laughter,
And the flag-flower lightened with love !’

Yes, it was a perfect spring day. I noticed too that the patches of beech in the hedges, which had lorded it over everything all the winter, were now thrown into the shade by the sprouting hazel round them. And everywhere the blackbird was singing—pouring out its wonderful song, out-trilling every other of the many birds that were hymning the sunshine and wooing their mates. I caught sight of the little beggar once, cockily perking its head on a topmost twig, in true artist's delight

at the intricacy of its own refrain. Every now and then I heard the lark; and once, when I was wheeling my cycle up a hill, I raised my eyes and saw the songster, a living speck in the sunny, cloud-flecked sky.

I chose the road I must have driven along many a time as a boy, seated opposite my father and mother, when the seventeen miles was considered a journey, and none of the new, much speculated with and talked of railways went near the place. And I remembered suddenly, as I caught sight of the gean-trees, shining in splendid white patches far below me in a valley as I passed it, how, as a child, I used to think these trees were covered with snow, and how often I had wondered at the marvel. No one had ever explained it to me: perhaps I had never asked. I used to puzzle out most of my weary little problems and delightful perplexities for myself. A child with an invalid mother soon learns not to prattle.

I passed through one or two little villages on my way, where the collie dogs rose from their slumbers in the middle of

the road and barked at me to a man, little Scottish villages,—a double row of straggling cottages, the newer ones ugly and grey, with tiled roofs; the older ones with their fronts 'harled' a warm yellow, or a dead white, or a faint blush pink, and their roofs thatched, with the lichens and the weeds sprouting pleasantly. Here and there a cottage older than the rest stood back a foot or two from the road, and defied the climate by an outside stair. On this stair, and at the cottage doorways, the women stood gossiping, their knitting in their hands; tidy old women, with clean, white, frilled 'mutches' round their wrinkled brown faces; and slatternly young women, their hair in curling-pins, their tow-headed children peeping round their skirts, and toddling out in front of my cycle. When I left the villages, with the barking collies and the hammering smithies, behind me, I met no one for miles, though it was not far from town,—no one in the fields, no one on the roads: I had it all to myself. Every now and then I passed a lodge at the entrance to some trim or stately avenue,

or beside closely shut iron gates. And, at last, when I had left behind me a little country town—where I had stopped and lunched off cold beef and beer at the inn—and the hills that had stood against the blue horizon in front of me, a beacon and a guide all morning, were also left well in the rear, I came suddenly on our own gates, and the little lodge, looking shrunken and overgrown with ivy; and I recognised it all and at once, and almost expected the same old woman to come out and welcome me. But alas! I was no master returning to his own, expected and looked for. The lodge, I saw at a glance, was empty and locked,—no smoke arose from its little chimney; the gates appeared rusted and uncared for; the avenue was sodden and dank, and the grass grew long and unevenly at its lichen-stained edges. I had instinctively dismounted as I entered; but, remembering it was a good mile to the house from this end of the avenue, I mounted again, and rode slowly, looking to left and right of me. The avenue led through trees of all kinds, too closely

planted, though now, in the radiance of their early spring foliage—here and there with leaves scarce fully opened, here and there with branches still bare—this showed less than it would in the full green of summer. It was cooler in this gloomy avenue, with the trees shutting out the view: I seemed to have left the warm spring day behind me. Was there a smell of coming rain in the air? I raised my eyes to the clouds; they were lying in great fleecy masses, fold on fold of dazzling whiteness, and vast depths of intense blue between; but overhead—yes, a dark grey cloud hung on to the under surface of the others, like a grey bird amid a flock of white gulls. I pedalled quicker, and suddenly the avenue swept round on to a high plateau with a broken stone balustrade; and here indeed I dismounted, for at the next turn I should see the house.

And when I saw it I did not recognise it: it was utterly different from what I remembered and had expected. It was just a big square stone house, the older part at the back, the front added to after

the ideas prevailing at the beginning of the century, with a high flight of steps up to the front door in the centre, and a row of windows above it—the sort of house children draw on their slates, only with the windows even. And then gradually I recalled it: the lawn in front helped me; but even that was changed. It used to be a huge tract of country, where one could spend a lifetime and not weary;—where one could marshal armies, and camp with gypsies, and build houses, and get lost in woods, and meet bears and lions, and fight giants. Now it had shrunk into an oval lawn, with clumps of rhododendrons on it, growing gradually wider till it sank away behind a rough shrubbery down to where I knew the burn was. But how poor and unkempt everything looked! The very steps up to the door were broken and green with damp: and the lawn, whose grass had been my father's pride and special hobby, was a wilderness in aspect if not in size. I began to understand the price now! It was the same when I went round to the stables—I postponed the key and the

necessary guide, and I left the enchanted burn to the last of all,—the same?—it was worse! The place was a ruin. The yard was half-paved, the doors were hanging on their hinges, the loose-boxes were broken down and filled with lumber, and the daylight made joyful entry through the roofs of the lofts. A dozen horses? Why, there wasn't decent accommodation for a tramp's donkey. There was not a soul to be seen anywhere, only rats and pigeons. What a busy scene it used to be! What happy afternoons I had spent there, trotting about after my father, with 'bread for the horses! There had only once been a meet at Craigstoun in my father's time, though he had been a keen hunting man; but I distinctly remember the gay scene the front of Craigstoun made, with the crowd of eager horses, and the pink coats, and the traps of all sorts and sizes, and the on-lookers on foot—no cycles in those days—and the wagging, panting pack. Yes, these stables had seen life before the grass grew between the stones of the yard.

Through the arched entrance I saw a

country yokel coming, dangling something in his hand, which something proved to be a bunch of keys. He was the first human being I had seen since I tipped the waiter after luncheon ; so I went to meet him.

The stables? Oh, I meant the farm—*it* was in ruins ; yes, certainly. The stables were quite new—there they were. And, raising my eyes, I beheld a horrible vandalism,—a cruet-stand castle, with a clock-tower. I declined to go anywhere near it. It had been built by ‘the last man,’ who was ‘terrible set on horses.’ I would have liked to hang him to the clock-tower.

So we went to the house, and the heavy key was fitted to the lock, and the front door was opened, and I stepped into the square stone hall—and stopped short, for I distinctly heard my father’s gay laugh ring through the empty house, and the rustle of my mother’s silk dress on the staircase, and the sound of her weary, gentle voice.

‘This is the dining-room, sir.’

Yes, there it was : low-ceilinged, dark-wainscoted, with three long windows looking

on to the lawn; all much smaller than I remembered it. How often I had 'come down to dessert' in this very room! I stood trying to recall the scene—the branched silver candlesticks, the glow of the fire, the 'after-dinner talk, across the walnuts and the wine.'

'The library is opposite, sir.'

This room held only vague memories for me, with its rounded end facing the window, fitted in with shelves and glass-covered doors, and giving the room a more furnished look than had any other part of the house.

'The morning-room.'

I waited till the man was out, and then stood on the threshold alone. It was my mother's boudoir;—such a tiny room, set in under the front sweep of the staircase,—all bow-window, which gave it the look of being a round room. No wonder my poor delicate mother had found the house cold! Her presence was here, in this little room; but it was a poor, discontented presence. I had felt the discontent as a boy, instinctively. My mother had never come down

to the burn with me, nor known the rabbits personally, nor cared about the hollow tree and all the delights of my world. Here, in this little room with its big window, facing, as I suddenly realised now, and verified by the compass on my watch-chain, due north-east, as the front of so many Scottish country houses, for some undiscoverable reason, do face,—here I felt that little cloud of feminine discontent that had shadowed my babyhood, and taken my father to die in a strange land, and left our old homestead to fall into desolation.

‘Will you look at the kitchens first, or go upstairs to the bedrooms, sir?’

At last I got rid of him and went down to the burn—and that had not changed! There was the deep pool, with the same frothy bit behind the boulder, and the big docken leaves growing close to the edge, and the overhanging branches above. And there, a few steps away, was the old stone bridge, the flat, moss-topped stones at either side of the path forming pleasant seats. I sat there now, listening to the gurgle of the burn, and watching the after-

noon sunshine steal in patches through the trees.

How near one's youth is, and how far off! Yesterday it was here, and to-day it can never be recalled—'and only the rushing of Time's wings between.' I lit a cigarette—that, at any rate, was a joy I was unaware of then—and yielded myself to the day and its influence, and then jotted it down in my pocket-book :—

Oh, bring it back again,
The old, sweet time
When Life was wonderful
And Love sublime ;

When we were innocent,
Earnest and true :
Who stole my youth away ?
—Dear, was it *you* ?

We went forth eagerly
To the unseen,
Seeking the beautiful,
Scorning the mean :

What were we winning to
All those quick years ?
To —

I shut the book and wound the worn-out

elastic twice round it. After all, it is morbid to maunder over one's own youth : there must always be youth in the world,—constant renewing,—the very spring round me preached that lesson for any one to read. There must always be youth in the world ; but not necessarily one's own youth. There was still the joy of the burn and the wonderland round it for any little boy now, as there had been then. It was the deserted burn that might complain, not I, to have only a dull old fogey sitting listening to its music. There ought to be a little boy playing by it still, and I ought to be in the library, 'o'er a great wise book as beseemeth age' ; or in the dining-room, at the head of the table, peeling oranges and cracking nuts for the small boy.

Well, there was no small boy to crack nuts for, and there never would be, as far as I was concerned. I had contributed my own youth to the world, and that was all the youth I ever would bestow on the old Moloch.

I wondered if ever I should buy this place, and spend a good deal on it ;—level

the new stables to the ground ; rebuild the old stables ; refurnish the house with quaint furniture ; get out my pictures, and all the other family treasures that are stored away ; hang the old Raeburn of my grandfather in his judge's wig and robes in its old place in the dining-room ; and the case of miniatures that stood in my mother's boudoir, and that I used to climb on a chair to look at. The boudoir—

I daresay I might be justified. I cannot spend half my shekels now that an advocate-deputeship has more than doubled the income that has kept me idle for over thirty years ; and, besides that, now that I am no longer an idle man, but often an over-worked one, I sometimes think I shall be wallowing in wealth in my old age, and shall have to look out some deserving charities to leave it all to. Yes, I might be justified ; but where would be the use ? No,—the country is like early rising, which, when you accomplish it once, you swear to be so invigorating and delightful a sensation that you express contemptuous wonder that any man ever lies abed after cock-crow ; but

next morning you breakfast at an easy ten as usual. So did I see myself in bachelor dignity at Craigstoun—it would kill me in a week. It had nearly driven me mad now. I threw away the end of my cigarette and took my time-table out of my pocket as I rose; I would go back by train.

All the spring day the clouds had been sailing in bright fragments far and wide in the blue of the sky, and the little grey hint of rain about three o'clock had floated away unnoticed. But as I walked back to the high terrace I could see, in the open stretch of landscape, showers falling far away, spreading little gleaming descents of sun-caught vapour as they fell, like the old Masters' pictures of the Transfiguration.

I looked at my watch and hurriedly mounted my cycle: I had barely time to catch my train. And I had forgotten to say good-bye to my burn. Well, well;—perhaps it had not recognised me as its old playmate.

CHAPTER XVI

JENNIE JARDINE

'You are looking off colour, Seton,' Sir John Macmillan said to me. 'What is it? The usual complaint of this time of year, I suppose—east winds? Or were your friends too hospitable all last winter?'

I had often thought they were; but, put in this way, it sounded brutal.

'The fact is that I am taking to society with an aptitude I never showed in my callow youth. I am like a young woman I met the other day, who told me that she had "come out," and then "gone in," and now she had "come out" again. It exactly describes what I have done,—or rather, what has been done to me.'

"As though a rose should shut and be a bud again," quoted Sir John. 'And so it is being done to you? You are merely a

passive factor, eh? Just be careful—it's a dangerous position. You may find a noose round your neck in no time.'

I sometimes wonder if Sir John Macmillan's face, handsome as it is, will not become coarsened and florid as he grows older. There are some men whom age improves,—Time writes a history in their faces, leaving an intricate record, worth study. And in most old faces there are the scars of battles, and the signs of pain and resignation, of trouble and thought. But there are some faces that Time does not deal kindly with—often the handsome faces; perhaps he finds them too arrogant in their good looks, and so, instead of tracing a delicate embroidery of wrinkles, and training the eyes to kindness and the mouth to endurance, he brings out his hammer and chisel and indents great clefts of peevish temper or selfish ambition, and spoils the original design. How is it women's faces are not allowed to improve with years? Is the fault theirs, or does it lie in our estimate? With all our modern notions, do we still, as ever our ancestors did when the

world was young, demand only the freshness of youth? Why is it that we hear so often such phrases as 'the remains of good looks,' or 'a well-preserved woman,' as if she were a pickled lobster? Is the Spring the only season, that Summer and Autumn and Winter should all be insulted by having their charms measured by the amount of Spring retained in them? Or has each season its own beauty, as well as its own worth? For my own part, I like late autumn, both in women and in the year. It doesn't think so much about itself—it has seen and heard of other things to think of. It is no longer burdened with cares, as Christian was with sins; for the determination to reach heaven with them on one's shoulders, though admirable, may be exhausting. Yes, I like late autumn,—so restful! Or even early winter, when the brood of house cares has flown to other climes and has left us free to think and talk of all that lies outside the nest. There is nothing so boring as taking a *débutante* down to dinner: either she is the modern minx, who talks about books she

ought not to have read—which is a type I am old-fashioned enough to abhor; or she has nothing to say for herself, and has not read the books you want to talk about—which is a type I am new-fashioned enough to find dull. We have not too many of the frivolous-married-woman type in Our Town: when we do have her, she and her clothes and her ways and her friends are all comically out of keeping in Our Town, like a person who appears in full evening-dress at a gathering garbed in the vestments of daylight. She has the comfortable consciousness of knowing she is right and we are wrong, just as the person in evening-dress has; but still it takes great moral strength to blazon it out. So she gives it up; and, after a wild flutter against the bars, submits to settle down, ceases her endeavours to reform us, and accepts our laws of use and wont. We are sorry to lose her—very sorry. We have no one left to find fault with, to pray for, to dream of! But Our Town has always been proudest of its *grandes dames*, of their clever faces, their silver hair, their proud carriage,

their shrewd sense, their sympathy, their ready, gladsome humour! They are distinctive—they are historic. Raeburn loved them, and he painted them as they deserved to be painted.

There are some women who have the immediate effect, when they enter a room, of switching on all the lights and flooding the place with sudden brilliance. They take a dull, dead-alive gathering by storm. A rustle of entrance, a genuine gladness of welcome, a dark, handsome, smiling presence, a few merry words here, a few upbraiding words there, and in a moment the room is filled with the buzz of busy talk and ready laughter, of jest and repartee, of life and amusement. But they do not keep the brilliance self-centred: electricity is in the air. One looks round to see the gathering transformed—people who were before sitting dully quiescent are talking animatedly; heavy groups that appeared kept together by mere cohesion and inability to break up are scattered, and re-forming in collective affinities. And meanwhile the author of all this good has sunk quietly down on a com-

fortable sofa, quite unconscious of her hostess's gratitude, and is talking with bright eagerness, and giving all her undivided attention, to an old friend.

'Do you know Mrs. Melville?' I heard a man ask a sojourning American. 'Because, if you don't know Mrs. Melville, you don't know Our Town.'

But the same might be said of others—of Mrs. Gordon Petrie, for instance.

It was my undeserved privilege to take Mrs. Melville down to dinner at Lady Macmillan's the other night; but alas! on her other side sat a Belgian savant, and any foreigner always proves irresistible to Mrs. Melville. I think Mrs. Gordon Petrie prefers a lion; and she has an art of turning the sorriest cubs into roaring lions, and sends out cards to meet somebody's aunt by marriage, or So-and-so who once wrote a letter to a daily paper. It is a good-humoured habit; every one at her house finds himself a celebrity, somehow. But in Mrs. Melville's dining-room the nations of the earth are gathered together. This Belgian at Lady Macmillan's, who 'spoke

none English, no not one,' as I heard him anxiously explaining to Mrs. Melville, won her hospitable heart at once. I heard him being invited to dinner, and then the quick French talk waxed furious—and so did I, and I turned to my other neighbour. She was not of Our Town: she came from the country. She was a heavy young woman, slow of speech; considering you, and all you said, with a disconcerting seriousness. Her complexion was naturally good, but suggested constant exposure to the weather, and there was a certain refreshing honesty both about it, and also about the fair hair, absolutely straight, tightly drawn back, and terminating in a plaited knot behind. She had large, well-shaped hands, with no rings. She somehow conveyed a territorial impression, and suggested an unquestioning life spent in useful stupidity. She referred to Lady Macmillan as 'my aunt,' and told me she was going to spend some months with her—going abroad with her and her uncle almost immediately, and then with them up to the North.

'Then I suppose this party to-night is given in your honour?' I asked.

'Yes, I daresay it is,' she answered, without any animation, and the conversation flagged.

I glanced down the table at my hostess, and wondered how she and her niece would hit it off. I should have been sorrier for the aunt had I not felt so very sorry for the niece.

Groping about for a subject, I was suddenly gifted with the powers of Sherlock Holmes, for, raising my eyes from those strong, big hands to that tight screw of hair, I tried her on horses—and then wondered I had not thought sooner of doing so.

'Who is it,' I asked myself, as I rose and held back a chair for my neighbour to make her way out, 'who is it says that a man is young as long as he can adapt himself to new environments? For, if that be true as well as clever, then I am still young.'

'You and my wife's niece seemed to find plenty to talk about, Seton,' Sir John said, later on. 'She is going to spend some time with us.'

'So she told me.'

‘Yes. Poor girl, she has rather a rough time at home,—an amiable stepmother, only five years her senior, and looks ten her junior—I mean—oh no!—but she goes in for looks and that sort of thing, you understand. Jennie Jardine would look extraordinarily handsome if she wanted to. Curious will her father left—he was my wife’s eldest brother. The daughter inherits the whole property; but he somehow saddled her with the stepmother—recommended his widow to her mercy, or something. The odd thing about it was that the old gentleman had only been married to his second wife about five months before he died, and all the relatives—the daughter included—had disapproved of the second marriage,—and then the entire trouble fell after all upon the poor daughter. The girl—whether in penance or in pure good nature I don’t know—has never turned her stepmother out; and the second Mrs. Jardine, who has only a small income of her own, finds it very convenient to remain. I suppose she regards her income as pin-money.’

'Perhaps Miss Jardine likes her companionship,' I said, by way of saying something; for I was not specially interested in Miss Jardine and her concerns.

'Hates it!' responded Sir John shortly. 'And the little cat of a stepmother not only lives on her, but behaves as if she were lady of the house. It made my wife rather wild—she was staying with them. She said Mrs. Jardine gave orders, acted hostess, and snubbed Jennie, and Jennie submitted. So my wife brought her off here for a visit.'

'And is the stepmother left in possession?'

'She finds the country dull, and so Jennie has taken a flat for her in London. I think she wanted the London house opened for her in state, but my wife prevented that. Jennie only needs a little backing: she is too good-natured.'

I felt an increase of interest in my neighbour at dinner, and a corresponding contempt for my own powers. I had not discovered all this individuality there must be in the young woman. How much

strength of character and romance of experience often lie beneath dull exteriors, whilst men and women with a gift for bright talk set out their shallow wares to advantage, winning sympathy and liking and interest with nothing to give in return! This poor young woman, with all her life in her background, her inability to talk, her probably immense ability to feel,—and I had flattered myself that I had discovered her whole soul was in the stables!

‘The stable is the only place where she is entire mistress,’ said Sir John, as if in answer to my thought; ‘the stepmother doesn’t know a thing about horses, fortunately, and the old coachman and all the men about the place are devoted to Jennie, and will take orders from no one else. And Jennie holds her own there; I believe she is the best woman rider in the county, and never misses a meet. Oh, she only needs to be given confidence in other things; if she married, it would be all right.’

‘Yes, or if the stepmother did,’ I suggested. From all accounts that might be a possible solution, it seemed to me.

‘Eh?—oh! Oh yes! But Jennie ought to marry: no single woman has a right to so much property. She might give it away to the Church, or something. Where are you going when the Courts rise, Seton?’

‘Italy,’ I said, glad to leave the subject of Miss Jardine and her matrimonial prospects.

‘Capital!’ cried Sir John heartily. ‘You had better throw in your lot with us—we are going.’

I put as much warmth into my reply as I could; but, truth to tell, Sir John, though he is a most engaging companion at most times, is not just the man I should choose for a fellow-traveller in Italy; and as the party was to be supplemented by Lady Macmillan and Jennie Jardine, the thought was insupportable. And I had planned out such a halcyon tour! I had meant to wander, all alone, through—

‘the Vatican,

Greek busts, Venetian paintings, Roman walls,
And English books.’

Yes, English books; for assuredly the raggedest volume on my Browning shelf—the dingily bound early edition, with *One*

Word More in its right place after *Men and Women*—it should go the Italian tour in my portmanteau.

Was it that same evening, or was it afterwards, that Sir John twitted me with my increasing prosperity? It was when I told him of my buying some pictures—one or two odd little bits of Scottish landscape that had taken my fancy.

‘You must be growing a perfect Cræsus if you are setting yourself up as a patron of art,’ he said; ‘or do you do it as a speculation?’

‘No, I can’t afford to speculate,’ I said, smiling. ‘But I am allowing myself all sorts of luxuries. I bought myself a horse the other day, and I am in treaty for a house in Our Town.’

‘A house?’ He looked surprised. ‘To live in?’

‘No; I don’t think I shall ever live in it. But it is a house I have always fancied, and it seems a pity to let it go. It is in a *cul de sac* at the end of a terrace at the West End, that catches all the sunshine going. They paint their front doors ivory

white there, and have pots of flowers in their areas, and train creepers up their walls; and they face a bank of green sward, over which peeps the Episcopal Cathedral. I tell you, Sir John, I am quite reckless, and have made up my mind to deny myself nothing, to buy whatever I fancy.'

'You had better buy a wife, my boy.'

'I can't afford speculation,' I repeated.

'Then let it be the wife buys you—it is a safer investment.'

'I am afraid she would regret her bargain,' I said coldly.

I remember, as I walked home from that dinner, I told myself that I should not go with them to Italy—no, nor near them while there. But I had accepted an invitation to go to them in the North later on—for the twelfth, they said. It was a long time ahead;—and, after all, why not? But I would have my Italy alone, first. I am too old to adapt myself to change of environments;—and I had dared to people Italy with my fancy, companions of my dreams.

CHAPTER XVII

OF DREAM-BURIALS

THE summer is past. My dream visit to Italy is long over—and in that land of buried pasts I have buried my past. After all, a man cannot live on in silence; though, in the shapings of our human destinies, it is often the silences that are most pregnant. A woman can do it, I am told. I have heard of an old woman of nearly ninety telling her young granddaughter, kneeling beside the death-bed, the secret of a life-long love—a love she had been faithful to all those years,—a love all unguessed, unknown, untold—unaltered by hopelessness, by absence, by death. But a man cannot do this. Or, if he does, he—well, it was to a granddaughter the old woman told her secret. She had married and made a worthy and dutiful wife, and had brought

up her children to call her blessed. The heart of her husband had safely trusted her, for she had done him good and not evil all the days of her life, laying her hands to the spindle and the distaff, and stretching out her hands to the poor; rising while it was yet night, clothing her household with scarlet and looking well to its ways, and eating not the bread of idleness: and always with this secret in her heart, leavening the whole. In spite of the words of King Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him, is it not something beyond praise that is the due of one whose 'candle goeth not out by night' after a day begun so early and filled with such unceasing activity? It sounds sad. Who knows the secrets that lie hidden in the hearts of the people we meet day by day and think we know so well, and perhaps consider prosaic and commonplace, because we have not eyes to see; or cold and worthless, because we have not hearts to understand? How the gods must laugh at our judgments!

So I dreamed away three weeks in Florence last June, thinking of many

things, denying myself no idle fancy, no wonder-vision, no 'congenial woe.' For I knew it was the last time, that after this I was going to deny myself everything.

There was a quaint old song my mother used to sing—my mother, who had died in this Italy—a song that belonged to the days when women with meek eyes and side ringlets and sloping shoulders used to sing simple sentiment with jangling accompaniments to the drowsy lords of creation after dinner. A verse of it recurred to me—

'I had a hope which in my heart
 Long time I cherished :
 And still from strength to strength it grew
 And seemed as beautiful as true,'—

No, my hope had never grown to strength ; but it had grown very fair as it grew less tangible. Now it was a mere dream-hope, a thing of the past ; and I was about to crush it, to kill it with my own hands, remorselessly. But I would spend my three weeks with it first, treasuring it, fondling it, never chiding it whatever pre-

posterous guises it came to me in, never telling it that its beauty and glamour were doomed. I would be like the 'chapmen' in dear old fourteenth century Langland's rough, tender verse, who were charged to chasten their children—

' Let no winning them forweny while they be younge
Ne for no pouste of pestilence please them not out of
reason,'

—so would I please my poor doomed dream out of all reason, knowing death to be hovering over it, knowing that it was going to be left behind me—buried in this fair foreign land, whence its ghost could never reach our cold shores to haunt me.

And so I returned to Our Town the day before the Courts sat, and was plunged into work at once. It has been a very hot summer—day after day a glaring heat, a smell of warm stone, clouds of dry, germ-laden dust and no water-carts,—and day after day at the Courts it was stifling, and my cases never came on when they were expected, but kept me waiting about all day and then were put off till the next.

I developed an extraordinarily bad temper

this last summer, with scarcely patience to allow any one who spoke to me to retain his life beyond the first two minutes of speaking. And I even hated those tried friends with their worn-out coats on my bookshelves; they evinced all the tactless familiarity of old friends, and would remind me suddenly of past things or start trains of thought that—wearied me.

As soon as I could I went away—alone with my temper—to the west coast, and breathed the peat smoke and smelt the fresh honey in the July heather. Why do we congregate in towns, I wonder, like ants on an ant-hill? Is it society we seek? But surely society is a matter of quality, not of mere quantity. Rubbing up against other men may sharpen the wits, but it can never deepen the intellect. It seems part of the scheme of creation that every man's soul should be lonely. However much a man may surround himself with friends, however many ties he may form, however deeply he may feel that other human souls are nearer to his than breathing, closer than hands and feet, yet he cannot escape the

absolute loneliness that will overtake him, the isolation of soul that will force him, sooner or later, to realise that, in a crowded kindly world, he must live and suffer alone, and die alone. And the greater the intellect, the more utter the intellectual loneliness. Our freshest, most eager intellects, do they not seem to come to us from the wilderness? Have I not seen this, even in my own profession? And what do the years teach them?—To accept blindly other people's standards, and to buy their thoughts ready-made; and ready-made thoughts are worse than ready-made clothes. But in the wilderness there is no temptation to take one's God 'from a printed book.' There are no printed books; but the mind is fed with reverence and sympathy till it grows strong enough to seek its own God. And it has leisure to seek Him,—mental tranquillity,—how few of us know it! Sometimes a sense of peace and rest surprises us in some lonely place—

'Where even the motion of an angel's wing
Would interrupt the intense tranquillity
Of silent hills, or more than silent sky.'

—It surprises us, and it frightens us, with the feeling of the awful, the mysterious, the inevitable, that it brings with it. But the old psalmist knew solitude of soul and was not afraid of it, when he told us confidently that ‘the mountains also shall bring peace.’

Was it peace I went to seek? No,—I think it was a period of ‘recollectedness’; and it resolved itself into the smoking of many cigarettes among the heather, and a half-formed intention of going in for political life as soon as I could afford it. A man who has been a member of the Juridical Society can surely summon up sufficient courage to address the House of Commons as it is nowadays constituted. I have noticed that the front Treasury Bench is pretty well made up of Scotsmen. I wish I could think of something better to do, but I cannot. My hair is distinctly grey in some lights, I have six hundred a year assured and what I earn, and no one cares a hang whether I live or die—myself least of all. But it is pleasant among the hot heather;—why should I attempt anything further

than living and dying? Nevertheless, whatever one's opinions on these subjects are, the twelfth of August is a date one does not overlook; and on the tenth of that month accordingly I returned to Our Town to collect my luggage, and to find Our Town hot and thundery and deserted, all the houses shut up, all the rows and rows of windows jealously papered inside, all the doors boarded or left blistering in the sunshine, with all the brass bells and all the door-plates growing dim and discoloured. The streets looked uncared for, with scraps of paper blowing about them, and with plentiful crops of grass appearing joyously between the paving-stones; the tourists lingered along on the wrong side of the street, guide-book in hand, or stood about on the steps of the hotels, or loitered to examine the pebbles and tartans spread out in the shop windows for their sole benefit.

The day after my return I met a flock of sheep ambling and nibbling along my street, the drover far behind, and his collie, hot and thirsty, at his heels. The sheep

were cropping the grass growing in the road—my stony, deserted street is quite a pasture-land in August—and when I went up my own door-step and opened the front door with my key, I turned round to find that one friendly sheep was accompanying me, bleating, into the front hall. Next moment the collie had sent it scampering back to its fellows, and I was left in possession of my house.

It is time I left town. I am off to shoot grouse. I am going to Sir John Macmillan's for the twelfth—he has been very pressing about it. After all, I was rather rude not joining them in Italy. Yes, I am going to Sir John Macmillan's—

'If 'twere done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly.'

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE DOG-DAYS

MISS JARDINE is at her best in the country. For one thing, she wears good boots. Boots are a special hobby of mine. A woman who goes out on the moors with patent leather toes has something wrong with her whole moral nature, no matter how small her feet may be. Miss Jardine wears sensible boots—sensible skirts, too,—and a businesslike felt hat, very unbecoming, tilted well over her eyes, unfortunately leaving a space between the brim at the back and the tight knob of hair. She looks smartest in her habit,—she rides remarkably well. We have had good sport since I came. Miss Jardine, by the way, often comes out with the guns, and tramps about all day without seeming to be tired; but she keeps with Sir John. I

have discovered that she is painfully shy, and quite indefatigable.

There are a good many people here, coming and going. My own visit, it seems, is one of indefinite length. 'Remember we have engaged *you* for the season,' Sir John says occasionally. Lady Macmillan suits her own taste and keeps the place swarming with military. A very good taste it is, too:—young and old, they are the salt of the earth. But Sir John has evidently given some independent invitations, with strange results; for Sir John in the country is actuated by nothing but a desire for enjoyment. There is a Royal Chaplain, deep in voice and rich in anecdote. There is an Oxford Don, nervous and scholarly, who relapses into a kind of Gregorian chant when he gets interested in what he is saying himself, and never tries to even appear interested in what any one else says. There is Mrs. Melville, keeping us all alive; and there is an eminent London physician, professionally qualified to do the same thing. There was a young artist, collapsed after a private view of his own

paintings,—but he is gone; and so, I am sorry to say, is a dear old ex-governor of somewhere,—a keen sportsman, who used to come down with his boots on, and fidget till we were ready to start. There is an extraordinarily sweet-looking, silent, well-behaved little girl of eighteen summers, whose hair blows into curl in wet weather, and whom I thought the pattern of English maidenhood till I came upon her calmly smoking a long churchwarden in a solitary summer-house,—‘By Gad!’ was all the comment a young lieutenant who was with me found himself able to utter. Then there were, and there are, other people from Our Town, besides Mrs. Melville.

But the man who interests me most is a man who came yesterday,—an extraordinary chap called Robertson, an ex-M.P.; a political agitator, Mrs. Melville told me; and a bounder, I was further informed by the young lieutenant. But he himself says he is a journalist. He has fastened himself on to me, possibly because the others have rather given him the cold shoulder. The women cordially dislike

him. Even Miss Jardine, whom I thought easy-tempered when her shyness allowed her to be so, suddenly became Miss Jardine of Spottis, reared her neck like a giraffe, and snubbed him most unmercifully. But he interests me: he is as clever as all the rest of us put together; and yet he can make no use of it, poor man, because he began his education at the age at which we most of us end it.

I went a long ride with Miss Jardine yesterday. A curiously dwarfed nature, hers, in spite of the largeness of her stature. An open-air woman, lacking all the grace of womanhood, and yet with a primitive honesty about her,—almost childlike in her simplicity,—the more admirable when one remembers her damned money.

I told her, for sheer lack of matter to talk about, of Craigstoun, and my visit there last May. She seemed interested,—especially, I must confess, in the new stables.

‘Are you thinking of buying the place, then?’ she asked.

‘I did, for one sentimental hour, and then I remembered I was a lonely bachelor,’

I said. And when I had said it I regretted the words, for she bent over and stroked her horse's neck and appeared embarrassed. I sometimes think she dislikes me.

In the evening there was dancing in the ballroom, and Sir John proposed that an old navy man and Miss Jardine and he and I should have a game of billiards.

'But perhaps Mr. Seton prefers dancing?' I overheard Miss Jardine say; to which Sir John evidently made some facetious reply. She frowned, and turned away; and then somehow I got involved in talk with that queer fish Robertson, and some one else took my place.

Later on I went and watched the game. My host seemed vexed with me, I thought. Miss Jardine plays well, for a woman; but she is ungraceful, and too much in earnest over this, as in everything. And she has extraordinarily large hands, and it is the more evident because they are sunburnt, a fine golden brown which ends in a clear line across the wrists. A woman with large sunburnt hands like that should not play billiards.

‘What have you been doing all summer? Come and sit by me, if you are not playing, and tell me.’ Mrs. Melville’s voice broke in on my thoughts as I stood watching the game.

I joined her where she sat in the little raised alcove.

‘Doing?’ I repeated wearily. ‘Oh, what have we all been doing?’

‘You have had time to accomplish a good deal since I saw you last.’

‘I have cursed the east winds in spring, and in summer——’

‘You were away. I remember you could not dine with me when I had my American author with me.’

‘Yes, and deeply sorry I was! It was good of you to think of me. To meet in the flesh an author you admire in print is one of the things that make life worth living.’

‘It is one of the things to be avoided!’ she cried. ‘If you like a man,—never read his books; and if you like his books,—avoid making his acquaintance: that is *my* advice.’

'Which you never follow. Witness this American author.'

I glanced at the book beside her, that she had laid face downwards when I joined her.

'I brought it in from the drawing-room,' she said, following my glance. 'I took it up by chance this morning, and have nearly finished it. Have you read it?'

'I have read others of his,' I said. 'Good plots.'

'Yes, some of the chapters are powerful; and all through there is a clever ring of the coarseness of manners of that age, like Fielding's novels, that made them call a young man a blade and a spark, and a girl a hussy. Fancy calling our young ineffables by such names! I think we are grown Homeric now. We do more than admire what is young and strong, we reverence it. Is it not so?'

'I have not been struck, I confess, by the reverence in modern fiction,' I answered. 'The range of human knowledge appears so unbounded nowadays that men reverence only intellect, for they recognise nothing

beyond. I would rather say, I think, that nowadays it is the gospel of irreverence that is being preached to us.'

'And yet,' she said, 'without reverence there never, surely, can be any intellect of any worth?'

'There certainly never *has* been any intellect of any worth without it. The highest mind is the kind of mind whose natural instinct is one of veneration. I was in Florence when I could not come to your dinner, by the way.'

'Your changes of thought are as abrupt as a woman's,' she laughed.

'The connection is quite clear in my own mind,' I told her, smiling.

'Weren't you with the Macmillans? I heard you were going to join them.'

'No,—I had to return to Our Town.'

'You did not come to see me.'

'It is merely courting disappointment to come to see you between April and November. It simply means being told sympathetically by your maid at the door that you are not in town.'

'I daresay—and no one is. We always

have to re-take up our friendships at the beginning of each winter, like lost stitches on our knitting-needles. And what did you do with yourself in Our Town?’

‘Sowed regrets, expecting to reap a goodly crop of hopes. It was very hot, and you were away, and as the dog-days drew on I became irritable. So I thought it was time to muzzle myself and come North.’

The game of billiards was over. Miss Jardine and her partner had won, and the players gathered round Mrs. Melville. I got up to put away Miss Jardine’s cue.

CHAPTER XIX

THE KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD

'WHAT do you make of that man Robertson?' Sir John asked me in the smoking-room one night. 'You and he seem constantly together: what attracts you?'

'He's an extraordinary mixture of queer knowledge and still queerer ignorance.'

'He's an extraordinary mixture of presumption and self-effacement; and I'm not at all sure I don't prefer the presumption.'

'It is his energy that attracts me,' I confessed. 'He has got as much potential energy as a steam-engine. The man will make himself a force, if his physique will stand the strain. He strikes you as the sort of man who will end his days either in a place of power or in a place of detention.'

Sir John laughed.

‘Don’t let him attract you, Seton,’ he said, handing me a cigar-case. ‘He is a man who uses other men; he has an extraordinary gift of making other men do what he wants them to do, all the while they are imagining themselves free agents. He has a kind of magnetic influence over men—over better men than himself, too.’

‘I suppose it is a part of his energy he utilises in that fashion.’

‘Don’t let him get round you. You are too good a man to be Robertson’s tool.’

‘I don’t think there is much likelihood,’ I answered, lightly.

‘What was he talking to you about?’

‘About the present position of affairs here, there, and everywhere, and the condition of the British working man, and the different capabilities of the different leaders in the Government and out of it, and about Ritual in the Church, and the dietetic properties of cheese, and miners’ wages, and Chinese education, and something about Bessemer steel and Cumberland iron mines, and——’

‘O Lord! No wonder it took up your time. You may spare me further details.’

‘It’s wonderful what the man knows, and has thought about, shrewdly, if not deeply. But it is equally wonderful what he does *not* know. I mentioned the name of Matthew Arnold in some connexion—I forget what—and he looked up and said cheerfully, “That’s the chap who wrote ‘not in entire forgetfulness and not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory,’ isn’t it?” and then, seeing a look in my eye, I suppose, that ought not to have been there, he corrected himself quickly—“oh!—stupid of me!—that’s *Edwin* Arnold, of course. I always mix them.” I let it go at that.’

‘The mistake was, not his ignorance, but his letting it be found out,’ Sir John said gravely. ‘It’s not like him to do that. He has a great gift of absorption—he is like a sponge, absorbs everything. I fancy most of his knowledge is superficial.’

‘N—no, not all, I think. But all that he knows of a certain class of knowledge may be. And don’t you think that his power of

absorbing and then reproducing as his own in itself shows cleverness?’

‘Cleverness, yes;—that’s the word. It is nothing else.’

‘And he showed the cloven hoof another time. He was talking about the opening of museums in Our Town on Sunday—and the man was dead against it: talked of “secularising the Sabbath”!’

‘But he’s an out and out Radical on all matters of tradition or custom——’

‘Very likely. Sometimes the prejudice remains after the faith that excused it is dead, just as the cage remains after the songbird has flown.’

‘Yes; you can never tell, long after a man has discarded all the trammels of his youthful training, where you mayn’t suddenly find a bit of the original egg-shell sticking. Well, what general impression did he leave you with?’

I smoked my cigar for a moment or two in silence.

‘Do you know, Sir John,’ I said suddenly, ‘he left me with a feeling, or rather the quickening into life of a feeling I have had

for a long time—a temptation I might almost call it—that I would throw up law and take to a political life.'

'Why a temptation?'

'Because a political career is the last thing in the world I am fitted for.'

'Then why think of it?'

'The temptation is—to use it as a means to an end. It brings power. Sometimes, when other things have failed one, one hungers for power in some form.'

'Very natural. Again I ask,—why not?'

'I'm too much bred in theory to make a good party-man. Politics is a profession, and needs an apprenticeship. The best of our statesmen have been nursed, trained in politics, from the cradle. Look at Pitt, at the top of the tree at twenty-five! A man can't begin that sort of thing at my age. And it's a dirty profession! If there were a great leader, one capable of carrying you off your feet with enthusiasm,—if it were the good strong days of Whig and Tory,—but nowadays the very names they give their parties tell of petty hair-splitting factions. "The best Club in London"—

it's getting rather a mixed Club! However, it's my own mixed motives that are troubling me.'

'A good deal of pitch is mixed up in most professions,' Sir John said. 'There's too much fastidiousness about you, Seton.'

'Well, but should I be justified? I think not. But that man Robertson gave me the hint of an opportunity——' I paused. He had not given me leave to make it public.

'I told you he would get round you—that is just what he wants you for. He asked to meet you some time ago.'

'No, really? Oh, I think you must be mistaken, for it was nothing he said, it was just——'

'Ah? Then he's an even cleverer man than I took him for.'

I laughed uneasily. 'His energy is infectious, I dare say,' I allowed. 'And his talk about men—the men who are jogging the world about—made me restless.'

'Those London folk think all the jogging is done at Westminster.'

'But we *are* rather dead-alive in Our Town, aren't we, Sir John?'

‘I’ve heard that before,’ he assented. ‘And yet a good many of the most upsetting jogs that the world has felt lately have been given her by men who have been brought up in Our Town. The front benches at Westminster—and the Southern Universities—and the Newspaper Offices—and——’

‘The top of the North Pole,’ I suggested, as he paused.

He leant back in his big chair. ‘So you find Our Town too quiet?’ he asked.

‘I like quiet,’ I said quickly. ‘But I don’t know that it is good for one. It’s a thing to come back to, not to begin with. Why, the very men who were with me at Cambridge,—my contemporaries——’

Sir John suddenly pitched his cigar away and sat up.

‘Yes, a few of them,—just those one hears about. Where are the others? How many men were there in your college? How many on your stair? What are they all doing now? Just you think of what you were two years ago, and then of what you are now. It’s not often done, I tell you! It’s once in a blue moon a man with us

idles about for ten years and then picks himself up, as you have done, and makes himself a name at the Bar,—or, at any rate, puts himself in the fair way of making one. Oh yes, you did idle! You need not look at me like that! You idled among poetry—I know all about that book!—and pictures, and music, and philosophy. There are worse things to idle among, I know. Your tastes were never gross; but they were much more dangerous, for they were like alcohol—they attacked the finer tissues of the brain. Any way, look what you are now—you are in a fair way to a large business. MacBrayne's Advocate-Deputeship——'

'Criminal,' I put in.

'An Advocate-Deputeship is not to be despised, all the same, even though you affect to look down on it as criminal work. It gives you an interest in your profession. You'll drop it when you get promotion; but don't drop it yet for a mere will-o'-the-wisp notion of taking to political life. That's all right later on. What you've got to do now, my boy,—forgive me if I speak plainly to you—is to marry and settle. The world

was made for man, and not man for the world.'

I knew perfectly what he meant, and he knew I did.—But here again, would a man be justified?

'*Money* is power,' Sir John added vaguely. 'You spoke of power.'

"Man does not live by bread alone," I muttered irritably, below my breath.

'It is the road to every kind of power,' he went on. 'You would find the world at your feet.'

He moved away, to speak to a group of men; and I took another cigar, and stepped out of a window on to the dark lawn.

It was a cloudy night. The clouds were racing over the moon so that the moon seemed to be rolling along the sky. The owls were hooting in the woods near.

It is a good thing for a man to throw himself into solitude, amid the whispering silences of night. What is it Wordsworth says, I think in one of his sonnets, about twilight removing from sight 'Day's mutable distinctions,' and leaving only the great outlines that must have been there since the

beginning of the heavens and earth? It is in moments of such stillness that a man finds out what his soul is made of,—whether the spark of Divine Light that kindled it is yet burning. And while I thought of all these things, and breathed in the heavy scents of the unseen foliage, I remembered the old plan of going out into the wilderness at times of mental trouble; and then I thought of the greatest Man of all, and how He too had gone out into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. And my mind ran on the old story, in all its simplicity of phrase and depth of meaning. Power—was it not power that was offered Him? Power,—and Sir John's words sounded in my ears: 'Money is power. . . . You would have the world at your feet.' At what price? Power to be got by attempting to overthrow the Divine laws had tempted me long ago; and now I was balancing the other temptation that was being offered me,—to gain the world at the loss of all else.

The night was an hour older since I had come out; and, looking up, I saw the

clouds were gone, and the sky had put on all her diamonds, and was twinkling and sparkling wherever the eye could rest. And, as I looked at the stars, one shot right across the heavens.

‘I will take it for a sign,’ I said to myself. ‘A sign—of what?’

And, as I said it, again the old feeling came over me, as if my help were needed, as if one in trouble called my name.

‘I am coming!’ I cried aloud, my own voice sounding strangely in my ears, in the night silence. And, hearing it, I laughed at myself; and the laugh sounded stranger yet, and the owls awoke and answered me.

‘Are you moon-struck, Seton?’ asked a voice quite near. It was Sir John, by himself. ‘Is it you, communing with the owls at two in the morning? Come in and have a whisky and soda. I was just shutting the windows, when I remembered I had seen you go out of one of them.’

I turned and walked back to the house with him.

'It must have been your voice I heard call me,' I said, wondering if he had heard my cry, 'I am coming!'

'I did not call you,' he said dryly. 'I heard you laugh.'

And I laughed again, for I suddenly wondered what my kindly host would think did he know that not five minutes ago I was drawing a fanciful likeness between his hospitable country home and a wilderness; and, worse still, between his genial self and Satan prowling therein.

The smoking-room was deserted save for one man—a young Writer to the Signet from Our Town, who was standing with his back turned to us, leaning over some newspapers at a side-table. He glanced round to see who we were, and then, as Sir John crossed to the other side of the room and occupied himself in drawing a bottle of soda water, the man went on reading, and I sauntered over towards him with the aimless intention of taking up another paper.

'Do you remember that old chap called Fairbairn who used to live next you, Seton?'

he said, removing his elbow from the pile of papers that I might take one.

‘Yes,’ I answered.

‘I see the death of his son here. Did you know he had a son?’

I held out my hand for the paper, without answering.

. . . Jack Fairbairn is dead.

CHAPTER XX

NOVEMBER IN OUR TOWN

NOVEMBER — it is always my favourite month: it is such a hungry month. It certainly requires you to be a friend and lover of Dame Nature—not merely an acquaintance—to be able to enjoy a country walk in November in Scotland; it requires a moral effort to go out—but then it is so delightful to come in again! The contrast between the out-of-doors—the bare, leafless landscape; the wet mud in the lonely roads; the misty outline of the distant hedges, drooping trees, and isolated farms with their well-stocked yards and their big chimneys; the smell of fresh earth, the general look in the fields as though they were tired after the harvest-bearing of summer and were resting till spring came and brought the ploughs

once again to trouble them ;—the contrast between all this and when one comes in-doors to warmth and light, to the removal of mud-caked boots and damp clothes, to the donning of easy slippers and smoking-jacket and the scanning of letters and newly arrived papers and the thought of dinner—I suppose a woman would say to afternoon tea,—the contrast, I say, enforces the lesson that the mind is its own place. In sleepy ease before the fire, comfortably weary, we can reflect that mortals, could they but realise it, are independent of outer circumstance; that the uncrushable fortitude of human intellect ought to suffice them for light and warmth and comfort, whatever bleak aspect the encompassing world may choose to wear towards them. We can be fretted, but cannot be played upon—cannot be forced to yield harsh music when the wind is rough, nor dulcet strains when the breezes are gentle, nor to fall into useless silence when there is no breath at all, nor to let our strained strings snap and recoil when the sun beats hot upon us.

November, damp and grey : and I have left the country, paid the last on the list of my visits, and returned to Our Town. Every one is returning to Our Town. The brown paper is all taken down from the windows of the stately grey houses, and the grey glass windows, like cold eyes without any lashes to them, stare down again at the same people passing to and fro in the same grey streets beneath. The last leaves have fluttered off the top branches of the trees in the sad-looking, railed-in gardens, and the winter is beginning. The inhabitants of Our Town are returning to their town houses and to their winter's work, and the brass plate that decorates every second front door has been polished, for the owner of the name upon it is within. The rain streams down the grey statues of the local celebrities, that have had no summer holiday, and drips off their pedestals; and the brown city sparrow perches at ease on the heads that have thought the great thoughts of bygone centuries, and prunes its little wet feathers.

Yes, winter has set in in Our Town. The University session has begun. 'Mr. So-and-so yesterday delivered his opening lecture to his class,' each day's paper tells us. 'Mr.'—ah! in the good old days it used to be 'Professor'—in the days when the Doric rolled sonorous from the platforms, and when, on the mid-winter Monday holiday, still called 'meal Monday,' the students returned to their homes to have their meal-sacks replenished and their clothes mended. In those cosy, simple old days Our Town was frugal in its ways of living, and dined at five in the afternoon, and asked its friends to supper-parties,—and Our Town was at its highest intellectual level. Alas! now, we have taught the glaikit Sassenach to drink whisky; but he has taught us to drink champagne. Alas! now, our students go with bursaries to learn southern notions after they have finished their college careers. Alas! now, southern teachers come flocking north, and the southern mispronunciation of the Latin tongue disturbs the ghosts of old dominies, and

makes the hair rise on moth-eaten wigs. The simple, frugal, intellectual days of Our Town are over—days of stern, rigid, narrow, domineering observance in the Church; days of pawky, Bacchanalian humour in the Law Courts; days of metaphysics-fed minds and oatmeal-fed brains in the class-rooms. All the unique characteristics of Our Town are dying out: her streets are spreading westwards, her sons are going south. Nevertheless we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared it unto us, the noble works that were done in their days, and in the old time before them.

Another winter is beginning;—another winter,—and what else? Is it another chapter, or is it the closing of the book? The same faces, the same names, the same stone palaces and towers, the same routine in the same grey streets,—and yet—nothing the same: a sense that all is changed.

For yesterday the house next door to me, that has been shut so long, was opened. In the morning I left it, as I have left it

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each day all these years, shuttered, silent as the grave. And in the evening the house greeted me with a look of life. The covering had been removed at last from the lower windows; the card with the address where the keys were—the card that had slipped awry two years ago—was gone. The keys had opened the front door, the door I had so often passed in and out of; it stood half open, the door that had been shut so long. In the upper rooms the brown paper had been partly torn down, to let the light hastily into the empty, tenantless rooms, and was hanging in peeled strips. The house next door to me is opened—to-day there is a workman perched astride on a window-sill on the second flat, painting the woodwork and whistling 'The Flowers o' the Forest.' He must be able to see into the drawing-room. And in the grey November weather the people are going about in the streets, greeting their friends of past winters, taking up the colourless threads of their lives, laughing, talking, undisturbed;—and I? A strange aloofness has fallen upon me,

as if not Jack Fairbairn, but I, lay dead in that dishonoured grave. Am I worth the trouble I give myself? Oh, that we were born without feelings, that we might reach maturity without regrets!

CHAPTER XXI

SAINT ANDREW'S STORY

It is over—I have seen her again. It happened so prosaically—so almost grotesquely, as these things do. I was walking home from the club. It was growing quite dark; the angry red sun had set behind the jagged outlines of the Castle half an hour before, as I came down the Mound. Suddenly, in the light of an electric lit shop window, I saw her. She looked so very young,—that was the first impression I had—such a little childish black figure! It may have been her dress,—she wore a little black sailor hat; I noticed even this—at least, I must have noticed it unconsciously, for I remembered it in my mental vision of her afterwards. Perhaps this was because, like a stupid, unknowing man, I had pictured her in widow's weeds—in long, streaming veil,

and all the paraphernalia of widowhood,—the widowhood that had for her begun so long ago.

There I saw her, the slender childish figure, one of the passing stream of people, her little tired child's face beneath her black sailor hat,—saw her suddenly, knowing she did not see me; and then as suddenly I knew—knew what I had been waiting for, knew that nothing mattered, neither heaven nor earth, nor my own unworthiness, nor the wasted years,—nothing, save that this woman lived, and I would win her, and my love for her, that was once like to have scorched my soul, should burn the poison from her memories.

I was glad that she had not seen me—glad that she had not seen me and spoken. What could I have said? A woman can do that, can smile and talk conventionally, knowing all the time,—knowing the other knows too; ay, and she can meet the eye of the other while she talks. But I could not have done it,—not without preparation. And I had had no preparation—I had thought it would not be for another month :

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was not the workman still singing as he painted? Had I not watched jealously the slow progress he made?

And now,—can I go back and know that she is there—close by me—only the stones between? Can I go back and wait—wait a whole day, I who have waited years, who thought to have waited a lifetime! Is it a dream? Have I seen Pansy—Pansy, whom I have seen every hour since she left me—every hour,—yes, every hour, Pansy! You have never been out of my thoughts. Never has the daylight waked me, but it has waked me to remember you. Never has a printed line or a spoken word thrilled me, but it was because it wakened an emotion that led me to you. Never has life seemed insupportable, but it was because Fate had wrenched my heart, and so tutored it to answer readily to the sorrow of the world. Never have I seen the stars or heard the sea or felt the wind, or looked at human life, or let my mind put out weak tendrils to feel the Immensities above and beyond us,—but it was you, Pansy, that I cried to through the barrier; it was my

love for you that spoke to me, that preached to me, that pleaded for me! And now—the silence is over. I have seen you again. Little Pansy! What a little thing you are in all the big world! I could take you in my two hands and crush you. And yet, how you are all the world to me! God!—how I shall love you, child! How I shall wrap you round with care and solace—if you will let me. *Let me?*

I went and bought some flowers, some faint hothouse roses that I found among all the ragged chrysanthemums with their tawdry colouring, and sent them to her. Flowers—such innocent messengers, dying decorously when they have delivered their message. A man need never feel shame at having sent flowers to his lady; their fragrance will wake her tenderness, and she will carry the memory of their message to her grave with her, long after the message is dead. So I sent Pansy roses;—and all the time I never knew, though she was so near me again, that she was in trouble. Man-like, I had been thinking only of myself, else I should have known.

Christopher Fairbairn would die. I saw it the moment I saw his face—read it in Pansy's eyes as they met mine. And this new grief for her, tragically present at our meeting, made our meeting easy.

Poor old stricken man! His son's death—ah, to him it means no release. All his son had done had not made him cease to be his son; and, now that it is over, the old man is slipping away as if the last link had broken that held him to the living. I was wrong, Jack Fairbairn,—one person regrets you—your old father, whom you slighted and wronged—your old father, who remembers now, not the wild selfish wretch who shamed him, but the baby boy his dead wife bore him, and laid in his arms. Yes, old Christopher is dying: I cannot speak to Pansy yet.

It was very quiet, the meeting. The old man seemed pleased to see me. He was sitting in his big armchair, a scarlet silk quilt over his knees, and he held out a trembling hand to me.

'Ah, Seton,—Gavin Seton,—I have thought of you often,' he said.

And I could say nothing. I took the gentle old hand in mine, and kept it a moment. His face was thin and waxen, his silver-white hair fell over his forehead, the rain-washed blue of his eyes seemed as if they had left the tears of this world behind them, and had peered into the Unknown, and there found Peace.

Pansy left us, very soon ; and then Fairbairn began to talk.

‘I could not write to you,’ he said, ‘but you have been in and out of my mind constantly, lad.’

‘And I,’ I said, ‘have hungered for news of you.’

He looked at me wistfully. ‘Ah?’ he said, and stroked the gay silken quilt with his old hand, and looked into the fire.

‘I did not undervalue your friendship ; but I should have known—should have written. It was difficult to write. It has seemed a short while to me. Perhaps I measure time by longer periods than you do, Seton,’ he added, with a touch of his old gentle raillery.

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'And now you have come home, sir, we must all take care of you,' I said, scarcely knowing what to say to him.

'Ay—I have come home, lad. I wished to die where I have lived—for I am going Home. Ay, my time has come. But let us talk of you, lad—come here where I can see you. You're surely growing very grey, Seton? What's your age, my boy? Dear me! Young people hang out their flags of truce very early, nowadays! But it suits you, lad; it has the look of powder on your dark hair. Yes, you're looking well, Seton. It is pleasant to see you again.'

'Mrs. Fairbairn is looking well, I think, sir.'

He let his eyes rest on the fire again, and clasped his thin white fingers on the scarlet silken coverlet.

'Poor lassie,' he said; 'poor lassie! But she is young yet: she will weather it. Indeed, it is better so. But I—I mind the past.'

'I saw it in the papers,' I said, gently.

'Yes,—it came suddenly at the end; or

so it seemed to us. You knew it was heart disease?’

‘I know nothing,’ I answered.

He looked at me in surprise. ‘Is that so?’ he said. ‘You remember we went suddenly to him?’

Yes, I remembered.

‘It was rheumatism he had—rheumatic fever. They sent for us, and they told us, when they wrote, that he was dying, and that he was to join us,—to die a free man. But when we got there he was so ill it was considered dangerous to move him,—and it was wonderful the kindness there. He got well; but it left him with heart-weakness, not very observable at first; but they—they stopped—they were very considerate—very kind.’ The old man’s face twitched. ‘They—they altered—what he did—as soon as they found his heart was affected. It had been—oh! I cannot speak about it, now! But Pansy and I decided to remain near, both on account of his health and because it was quieter for us. We were able to see him at intervals: she always came with me. But he would hardly—he

was so changed, so as if he—oh Seton, it was very trying—almost worse because she would come! And yet once, when he thought it was only I had arrived, he—oh——'

'Don't tell me!' I said, as he covered his face.

He did not seem to hear me.

'They were kind to us. The doctor was very gentle when she and I asked about it. And it was light work they gave him—book-binding, and tailoring, and then—knitting. Oh my poor boy! But it was better—it was better so. But he—he did not like to see us. I think that it might have been—I think he might have grown softened if—surely his old father—he would have known I remembered nothing—resented nothing! Ah well, it is all past now! He grew worse, each time we saw him,—saw him—saw him like a beast, pacing behind the double bars,—we could note the difference three months had made. And he seemed, from being callous and hard—oh, who can blame him for it?—to become strangely apathetic, as if he were

dulled to feeling. Sometimes he would scarcely speak to us—and what could we say worth his hearing, we with our hearts bursting, and the warder walking up and down the passage between the bars that separated us? And then he was very ill—in and out of the Infirmary for the last year. And they thought it might end there. God forgive me, Seton, but I sometimes had it in my heart to pray it might. She—the poor lassie—I know she must have thought that too, and she must have dreaded the other possibility—but she never said that to me. Oh, I cannot forget all she was to me in those days, nursing me—for I was ailing too, useless old man that I was. But perhaps that kept her busy. All those hot days in the little cottage we took in Jersey, and the old French-speaking servant, and Pansy sitting beside me in the little garden among the wonderful flowers, high above the sea,—and always that thought at our hearts—what should we do when the time came . . . a free man. But we never spoke of it: we lived from day to day. And then we could write to him. That was better

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than seeing him; for I hoped sometimes our letters might reach him when he was sad, and that he might guess it was not bitterness but pity I felt. I wrote to him out of my heart; and it may have found its way to his. I could write more freely, though I knew the letters were read by other eyes first, yet—they must read strange letters—sad letters—they would not wonder at what an old man wrote to his son! But when I saw him, it was difficult. I suppose it is my Scottish blood; or perhaps it was because he—but who can blame him? And they told me it was better so—they said, the doctor said, that it was part of his illness, that he instinctively shielded himself from feeling. They told me I must not agitate him; and I sometimes wondered if they always gave him my letters, for he never mentioned them. And latterly, when we went, we were bidden to speak only of little things, not to excite him. And it was in our thoughts, Pansy's and mine,—that the—that when it came his time, if God willed it, to be restored to me—to us—that it would be his deathblow

—the change. But it was still some months away, and it seemed as if my poor son would not live to be restored to us—as if the greater Release would come to him the first.'

The old man paused, and I sat silent.

'God's way is best, Seton,' he said presently. 'He made it all easy to us when the moment came,—what we had been dreading and fretting over—

"The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head."

It all came suddenly. They told us one day that we should have him sooner, a little. I think it was because—because it is the rule to free them when—when God takes the vengeance into His own Hand. And—and so we fetched him. And he did not seem to feel at all—he was quite unmoved,—quite dull and apathetic! It was partly what they gave him, the opium he had to be given. It made it easier; it removed our fears; and yet—it made him so far off! I felt then, for the first time, as if—as if my heart broke.'

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'Ah! it was because of the drugs!' I cried. 'And remember what the doctor explained about the teaching of his illness, dear Mr. Fairbairn! I have often myself heard of that—heard of people with heart disease who seem as if they unconsciously assumed the armour of indifference—would not let themselves feel—'

'Ay,—but is the *body* the end of all?' The old man looked up with a kind of fierceness in the misery of his eyes. 'Are we to protect the body?—It was the immortal soul of my son I had the right to meet!'

Suddenly the fierceness died from his face, and his old head sank on his breast.

'And the day is not far off—the day is not far off!' he whispered. 'It may be I shall meet him there, clean washed as a little babe—that he will forgive me if I did aught amiss in the old days, when a little tenderness, a little wisdom and sympathy, such as his mother would have given him, might have prevented all. I often think of that! But I hungered for a word of forgiveness—of love. And if I was denied

it—that was my punishment. God is just.'

We sat in silence.

'A woman is a strange creature, Seton,' he said presently, in a changed voice.

I roused myself. 'Yes?' I asked, wonderingly.

'That little maid—she—she helped to nurse him, she and the kindly old French-woman. We had a nurse with us, and the doctor lived near—it was all arranged for him; but she seemed glad to be allowed part of the nursing to do, and that the long hours of idle waiting and dreading were over. And I think she was—that it was a relief to her that he took everything quietly—just spoke to us of the things that were being done for him at the moment. He was like a petulant child, asking for things, and she soothed and spoke to him as if he were a child, with only a child's amount of responsibility. She could do it: the truth is that her love was dead, and so she could bear it; but mine—and he was my wife's son: it was impossible for me. It did not last long. The end came very quickly.

He was propped up by us in the garden, and I think I was drowsing. Suddenly I heard Pansy moving, and—it was one of his attacks. The doctor was close at hand, but the nurse was out, and it was Pansy who ran into the house—I see her now, in her white dress, with her set white face, standing shaking the bottle on to her handkerchief, and pressing it over his face. She had done that once before and saved him; but this time it was too late. The doctor came,—but it was over. He never spoke—I do not know yet. But I shall know it soon.'

Again we sat in silence, and then I began speaking of their return.

'I did not know you were coming back; I thought perhaps you and your daughter were away,' I said.

'Yes, we went away. We went across to the north of France, first. I forget how long we stayed. But every place was too like the place we had been in—I think we both felt that. And I could not bear the grey of the English Channel! But they kept us there,—said I wanted heat,—and I longing,

Seton, for the caller air of the North to bring the tears to my eyes again! So one day I said to Pansy I would return, to die in Our Town, where I have spent all my days,—die among my own people. And so here I am back, and the good Scottish voices are just music in my ear, and the smell of the rain on the stones makes my heart swell within me,—and beyond the grey skies is my own Heaven that I learned of when I was a boy—and a hard thing they made it to get entrance there! But I'm thinking I will not now find it hard at all,—for God knows I am wearying.'

CHAPTER XXII

FIRST SNOW

THE first snow of the year. How white and pure and peaceful the street looks! Not a wheel has passed, not a footprint shows, not a breath has stirred the trees in the gardens, to scatter the snow off the little laden twigs. And still the snow falls, feathery flakes wavering this way and that, making the air above grey, and the world below dazzling. Snow is like love: it covers a multitude of sins.

And here the coffee in my little brass machine suddenly bubbled into the other jar; and, as I went to the breakfast-table to blow out the flame beneath it, I heard a cart rattle by; and when I returned to my post at the window—two ugly wheel-tracks had broken through the snow. Never mind: was it not still falling?—soon it will

be even again. But it is at times like this—times when Nature suddenly asserts herself—that one longs to be in the country. To be in the country, where snow and souls can preserve their purity.

The first snow of the year, though it is the end of January. Snow covering all the grey town, transforming it into a city dazzling and sparkling. But alas! the ideal can never survive in a town—here are half a dozen men with spades over their shoulders, and presently the harsh scraping of their spades on the stones grates on the ear, and the ideal is being flung into great heaps by the doorways, and the real is showing through and being sprinkled with salt and sawdust. I returned to my breakfast and was very late at Parliament House.

Since Sir John Macmillan was raised to the Bench I seem to have got into his black books. It can't be anything I have done, because Sir John expects his fellow creatures to be sinners, and rather likes them for it. Besides,—I have done nothing. Perhaps that is it. I certainly have not been much

at their house this winter ; but then I have not been much anywhere, having been entirely taken up with that dear old man next door. It puts you out of touch with everything else, a thing like that, which fills your mind to the brim. It is not that I can do much, either for him or for Pansy ; indeed, there is nothing to be done. But I can think of nothing else. The whole atmosphere outside jars on me—even the tones of people's voices. And I have no right to feel all this, no right to demand the consideration of reticence, for he is nothing to me but my neighbour, and one's neighbour is not a recognised relation in Christian countries.

So Lady Macmillan asks me if I know whether old Mr. Fairbairn's daughter-in-law will be left well provided for ; and Lord Macmillan adds that it will be an ugly thing if she isn't, after the way the son treated her ; and Lady Macmillan remarks, in her hard voice, that no doubt that was part of the compact when she came back to take charge of the old man. Well, I suppose I am a fool to mind hearing things like this,

—I should not notice them if it were any one else under discussion; but somehow Lady Macmillan's tea chokes me, and the sound of her voice makes me long to choke her. So I have not seen much of the Macmillans this winter, though I know I have called as often as duty prompted, and dined there twice, I think. And I did go to help with their children's party on Christmas Eve. I rather wondered why, as there are no children in the house, they gave a children's party; but I was enlightened by a lively young woman, who, like me, had been asked to 'help to amuse,' and who seemed to think her duties accomplished if she amused herself. 'It is such a good plan, this,' she said, fanning herself contentedly, and surveying the ballroom, in the centre of which about sixty grown-up people were waltzing, whilst round the edge of the parquet floor about a hundred children stood and watched them.

'An excellent plan,' I agreed; 'but isn't it rather a pity the children all stand round the room?'

'Yes, they do get in the way, certainly;

but they are all to go at eleven o'clock,' she replied. 'You see, Lady Macmillan can't give a proper dance just now because of her niece's being so ill. They expect any day—' she lowered her voice—'of course it would never have done to send out invitations.'

'Of course not,' I agreed. 'I had not heard——'

'But a children's party is quite different—it has all been arranged quite informally. There were no cards sent to any of the grown-up people; we were asked verbally to come and help. Shall we go outside? I wish those children would keep out of the way!'

But the children would not keep out of the way; neither would they go at eleven o'clock. They drank champagne and ate salads, and one pretty little girl in a white frock and much-crimped hair invited me to come and call. 'I am sure we could amuse you,' she said languidly.

It was at the end of the evening, as I was hunting for my overcoat in the cloak-room, that I overheard Lord Macmillan,

out in the hall, answering some one's inquiries.

'Yes, we are very anxious about her,' he said, and there was a note of real worry in his voice.

'She always seemed so wonderfully strong,' answered a woman's voice; 'it seems quite impossible to connect her with illness. I trust you will have better news soon.'

And then there was a name called, a rustle of hasty departure, and the sound of the front door closed on the rattle of wheels on stones; and I came out to meet Lord Macmillan walking across the hall, with his grizzled head bent, and his hands behind him.

Struck by a sudden thought, I went up to him.

'I heard you had a niece ill—it isn't surely Miss Jardine?'

He looked at me a moment.

'Oh! You had not heard, then? Yes, Jennie's down, poor girl.'

'Not serious?'

'I don't know what you call serious!' he

answered, almost testily. 'A nasty fall in the hunting-field—and she was dragged—' his face twitched. 'I wouldn't care a jot if it had been one of my other nieces; but somehow this girl—she's not my own niece, either, she's my wife's—but she—she took my fancy. She's one of the right sort.'

I murmured something—something that sounded very conventional, about trusting for better news. I was inexpressibly shocked; but what can one say? Sir John's eyebrows went up.

'Oh, I daresay she'll recover; though some people would rather be— It's a nasty trick to lame a girl like that!'

'*Lame?*'

'Oh, don't speak of it! Yes,—*lame!* They are afraid she'll be lamed for the rest of her life. And the sole pleasure she had in life was hunting, poor woman! She'll never mount a horse again, anyhow. Oh, don't speak of it—' he cut short anything I could say—'I tell you the whole thing makes me angry! Are you off? Good-night, then.' So I was dismissed, and went.

Poor Jennie Jardine! Yes, it was hard. I thought about it a great deal, after that Christmas Eve; and, when I saw Lord Macmillan up at the Courts the first day after the Christmas holidays, I went up to him at once, in spite of a distinct unfriendliness in his manner, to learn more news of Miss Jardine's progress than I had obtained at his door when I had inquired.

She was quite convalescent; but she was, he told me, still very lame, and had to walk with a stick. He told me the step-mother had come out trumps and had nursed her all through, and that the two were now devoted to one another. What queer creatures women are! All that was nearly a month ago. It is now the end of January, and she is probably quite well again, I suppose. I think I ought to have called and asked.

The first snow of the year, and it has set me again thinking of poor Jennie Jardine. Why, I wonder? Perhaps because snow makes me long for the country, and the country makes me think of her. She was distinctly country-bred, with all

the large, uncompromising virtues of the country, and all that it lacks of artificial, intellectual. There was something colossal about her, and something infantine. She was born to be the mother of strong men; and she would have taught her boys courage and reverence, and her daughters endurance and patience. She had immense capacities for all these homely qualities herself;—poor soul, she will need them now!—But she had no poetry in her, no light grace in the play of her mind, any more than she had any outward beauty to fascinate the eye. It would be impossible that she should inspire passion. To be doomed to lameness all her days! What a fate for a woman who loved country life and activity! And how well she rode!

The first snow; and it is the end of January. The worst of our northern winter is yet to come, I am afraid—all the east winds of spring.

My poor little Pansy, how sorry she will be to see this beautiful snow! How we have studied the weather, these last two months,—consulting, fearing. And how

pale she has grown in the heated rooms, watching him with her tender eyes! February and March, and the east winds, —I dread them! I never noticed them before. But Saint Andrew refuses to be taken away from Our Town. 'I will die here,' he says, in answer to each suggestion we make to him. 'You don't know how I love Our Town.' And the doctor tells us it is too late to thwart him.

To-morrow I leave Our Town for a week or so. I have to go to Berlin with Erskine to take proof in connexion with this great Campbell case that is coming on. I hate going away, even for this;—but Pansy has promised to write to me, and I have never had a letter from Pansy yet.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WORDS OF A SONG

IT was thinking about Miss Jardine in the morning that made me go and call on the Macmillans in the afternoon to say good-bye. As a matter of fact, I wanted to speak to Lord Macmillan anyhow, about this Campbell case; and so, when he came in, I went down to his study with him. The coldness had disappeared from his manner, I was glad to see, for he is a friendly soul, and I have a kindly feeling for him. I can never forget he did me a good turn once, when I was in low water.

‘How is Miss Jardine?’ I asked, as he lit his cigar, standing with his broad back to me, and his handsome, crinkly, iron-grey head bent over the flickering match. I had abstained from asking Lady Macmillan about her niece.

He finished lighting his cigar, and then looked at me quizzically.

‘Women, Seton, as you may have discovered—or, again, you may not—are full of surprises.’

‘A surface intimacy with Elizabethan poetry has shown me it is an accepted opinion,’ I answered.

But, as Sir John said nothing more, only smoked on, looking humorously into the fire, I was at last obliged to break the silence.

‘In what way, may I ask, has Miss Jardine surprised you?’

Lord Macmillan again examined his cigar, and flicked the ash off it reflectively.

‘Do you remember that man Robertson who was with us when you were?’ he said slowly.

‘Perfectly. Clever man.’

‘Very. Oh, very! Remarkably able.’

Again he paused. I became irritated.

‘He’ll make himself a name,’ he added. ‘At least, I hope so,—for my niece is engaged to him, it seems.’

‘No!’

Lord Macmillan looked at me from under his thick eyebrows. There was a gleam of fun in his eyes—evidently he was pleased by his news. I roused myself.

‘It—she—then I suppose she is better?’

‘Yes, she has made a wonderful recovery—thanks to her splendid constitution. Dear me—it’s less than two months since her accident, and she writes that she is hobbling about with only the aid of a walking-stick.’

‘Was the news unexpected?’ I asked; for, while he had been speaking, I had had time to remember how chilling Miss Jardine had been in her manner to the ex-M.P. of so much promise.

‘Entirely. I believe I was mainly responsible, however, for when I heard Robertson was going down to her part of the world to get up something—he’s a man who is always getting up something—I gave her a hint to invite him. And then, of course, it was I in the very first instance who introduced them. Well, he went: that was in November, before her accident. Of course I can see now that he must have

had this in his mind, and just made the excuse to go there. He stayed with her and the stepmother, and left the very day before the accident; but, it appears, he returned when he heard of it, and hung about the neighbourhood.'

'He is much to be congratulated,' I said. For the life of me I could not help sounding stiff.

'Yes—but so is she!' Lord Macmillan answered quickly. 'You thought highly of him, didn't you, Seton? And Jennie has had the sense to find out his good qualities. He's a sterling man, and as sharp as a needle. He'll worry his way to the very front, you may depend upon it. If his party comes into power—which Heaven forbid!—you mark my words, Robertson will be heard of. And Jennie will help him considerably. Oh, I shouldn't wonder if the girl have a future before her.'

Well, if her uncle was pleased, it was no business of mine.

'You said once, I remember,' he went on, 'that he was a man who would end his days either in a place of power or in a place

of detention. I think this settles which it will be.'

Yes,—no doubt it did. It might even be called his first step.

'You remember what extraordinary energy and unlimited self-confidence he had?—well, he has already discovered, Jennie tells me in her letter, that her factor has been systematically cheating her,—cutting down some of the finest trees on the property, and selling them without her knowledge—at least without her knowledge of the prices he got for some of them. And Robertson, it seems, is advising her to try all sorts of odd systems with her tenants, and—' Lord Macmillan chuckled,—'he has had down a motor-car and is taking her long expeditions—driving it himself!'

'That is to make up for the riding, I suppose.'

'Yes,—that is what he says. Oh, he'll fill up her life for her! He deserves all he has got! But now to business, Seton. I'll show you those letters I spoke of, if you like.' He threw the end of his cigar

into the fire, and rose and went to his writing-table.

We talked business for an hour, and then I left. But it is a queer thing about Miss Jardine. I was mistaken in her character. Robertson!—bah! I had thought her too sensible to marry for the sake of a career—for that, of course, is what it must be. You never know the discontent with fate of which these massive, silent, non-assertive women are capable. Well, I hope he is a good fellow; but I doubt it.

In the evening I went next door to say good-bye. I could hear music as I went upstairs—Pansy playing to the old man, as she often did. So I signed to the servant, and waited on the landing; and, when he had left me, I stole nearer to the door. It was ajar, and Pansy was singing, very softly. I pushed the door a little wider open and stood inside, behind the big screen that has of late been drawn round to shut off all draught.

Saint Andrew's taste in music is simple. He likes hymns,—quaint old hymns, sung very slowly; but I think he, half uncon-

sciously, considers it irreverent to sing them except on Sundays. And he dearly loves Scotch songs—'Ye Banks and Braes,' and 'Annie Laurie,' and 'John Anderson my Jo,' and all those the words of which he knows best. But there his taste in music ends; for, though he thanks Pansy courteously for whatever she chooses to sing to him, he always adds an appealing request for a Scotch song, or for one of his favourite hymns, 'before you close the piano, my dear.' And so gradually Pansy's music-books have fallen into disuse, and the hymn-book and the two volumes of 'The Songs of Scotland'—an older edition than any other I have met—lie on the top of the music-stand.

Pansy was singing the last verse of 'The Land o' the Leal' as I came upstairs; and, as I reached the door, she broke into 'Aye waukin, oh,' with a little minor addition—'Oh this love, this love!'—that I had never heard interjected before, but belonged, I fancied, to the old edition of the music. From where I stood I could see that Saint Andrew had fallen asleep, and I hesitated

to come in at once, when Pansy finished, for she played a few idle chords softly, looking at him, as though to test whether his sleep were real. And whilst I stood she stooped and took up a book out of the stand at her side, turned the leaves, adjusted the shade of the candle, and began to play. I knew it,—what she was playing. It was Topliff's setting of Ruth's words to Naomi. Pansy began it softly, striking the rich harmonies, crooning the recitative below her breath. Then suddenly the words came, clear and soft, so that they thrilled me, as her voice always thrilled me:



I stood immovable, listening to the pleading words that swelled into force of feeling, and then fell into entreaty again.

And only I saw the old man by the fire had wakened, and his thin, transparent hand went up to his brow, and he sat listening.

‘Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee . . . for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will

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lodge. . . . Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. . . . Where thou diest will I die . . . where thou diest will I die, . . . and there will I be buried. . . . The Lord do so to me . . . and more also, . . . The Lord do so to me . . . and more also . . . if ought but Death part thee and me. . . . Entreat me not to leave thee . . . or to return——'

'Pansy! Little one!'

The old man rose staggering from his chair, for her voice had broken, and her head was bent over the keys.

She started up and was with him in a moment, pushing him back with gentle force. 'Father! Father!' I heard her say, as she knelt down beside him in the half dark. And then I was out, groping my way downstairs, out into the trodden snow, shutting the door softly lest they should hear it.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SILVER CORD

How gently Christopher Fairbairn accepts the fell decrees of fate! It is like the falling of twilight at the end of a long day. One by one the familiar landmarks fade before him. For the last month he seems to have been living in the past. Sometimes he calls Pansy by his wife's name; and then sometimes he does not know her at all, and looks distressed and troubled, begging her to forgive him, but her name has for the moment escaped his memory. Then again, for days together, he is quite himself. Twice he thought I was his son, once calling me 'laddie,' and saying to me that my mother had been telling him I was pressed for pocket-money, and that he did not give me enough.

'Oh, I have enough, sir,—I have enough!' I found myself exclaiming.

'No, no, Jack, my boy; your mother has told me,' he answered me gravely. 'I don't blame you. I was inclined to, but she has made it clear;—but don't take that way again—don't take that way again. Come to me—always come to me or to your mother.' And he asked for his cheque-book; but when it was brought—Pansy brought it, beseeching me with her eyes,—he had forgotten again, and fingered it idly. And then, a second time, he called me by his son's name, waiting till we were alone, and clutching my sleeve with his quivering hands.

'You will be good to her, Jack—you will be good to her when I am gone? The flower you plucked to fling away, Jack, it fell into your old father's garden. Will you leave it blooming unmolested on his grave?'

And I knelt down by him.

'I will take care of Pansy, sir, if she will let me. I will take care of her,—so help me God.'

And he lay still a little, and I kept still too, not knowing if he had heard.

'Ay, Gavin Seton, I know you love

her . . . I know you love her. And you are a good lad.'


He sighed, and plucked the coverlet with his hand; and I rose, feeling shamed: for was not his son dishonoured and dead?

He might have cursed me at that moment; but instead—— 'God bless you, lad, as I bless you,' I heard him say, in a weary, gentle voice. And then Pansy came in, and he looked at her wistfully.

'Who *is* she, Seton?' he whispered to me. 'It is kind of her; see, she has brought me flowers,—and she a stranger.'

And I think, after that, he forgot what had passed between us.

Poor little Pansy! I have done all I can for her, and now it is she who must give me the right to do more,—to win her back from the Hades of dark memories, to have her and to hold her from this day forward, for better, for worse,—to love her and to cherish her and to worship her. Oh, Pansy, Pansy! I have waited so long and loved you so well—is it all to count for nothing? Is the heaviness of experience to strangle young-eyed Hope?



CHAPTER XXV

WITH THE SETTING SUN

I WAS a fool to ask her when I did! How clumsily men manage! I was thinking of her in her desolate position, and it seemed to me the time had come. And then, at the first hint my words brought her, she stopped me.

'Give me time,' she said. 'It is due to yourself too.' And so at that I left her, and waited.

But how slowly the time passed! How the weeks dragged by! I saw her daily. Together we tended the old man. Each morning I went in on my way to the Courts, to ask how he had spent the night; and each afternoon I took her flowers, or a new book, or an English newspaper from the book-stall, or some little thing to cheer her, to bring her a breath of the outside

world. Or I would sit by Saint Andrew and read to him whilst she was out. And I took care of all his business letters, and she left these things in my hands. And so daily I saw her; and yet how slowly the weeks dragged by! But the hour came at last.

She was out one afternoon when I asked for her, and I went straight up to Saint Andrew, and, on leaving him, down to the study, to search for a memorandum I required. I opened the door softly, and found the little dismantled room flooded with afternoon light, for the blind had been pulled up, and Pansy was standing there at the window, with her face away from me. When she turned round her face was in shadow, with the golden glory behind her; but I could see her eyes were soft with tears.

Far in the distance a hand-organ was grinding the air from Verdi's *Miserere*. I looked round the familiar room, remembering how I had once told Saint Andrew that if there were a woman in his house his study would be refurnished. It had not been

used since they had returned—seven months ago, now. The carpet lay in a big roll in front of the empty grate; the chairs stood, a shapeless mass covered with a great piece of sacking, in the corner; some of the books had been taken out of the shelves and were piled up on the table, with a cloth flung over them.

No greeting passed between us: the time for greetings had gone by.

‘What are you thinking of?’ I asked her gently.

‘Thinking of?’ she repeated. And then, as if answering her own question rather than me, she said dreamily—

‘I believe I was thinking of the old Rectory, and the garden. It used to be so beautiful on hot summer evenings—this yellow light on the hayfield. I wonder if they let the school children in to pick the gooseberries, now,—but they will be different children.’

‘Do you long to return to it all?’ I asked, with a quick pang of jealousy.

And at that she suddenly became conscious of the present, starting a little, and

putting up her hand and pushing the hair back from her forehead.

‘To return?—Oh no! I could never return . . . it is dead,’ she answered, in a hushed voice,

There was a pause, and outside the hand-organ still played the air from *Il Trovatore*; but it was further away.

‘Do you know what *I* am thinking of,—what *I* am remembering?’ I asked her; and, as I spoke, my pulses suddenly throbbed against my brain.

She turned to me, questioningly.

‘I am thinking—I am remembering—a song you sang the night before I went to Berlin, last January.’

She tried to recall it, keeping her eyes on mine as she thought; and then she shook her head and gave it up.

‘What I heard you sing that night to Saint Andrew were Ruth’s words to Naomi—“Thy people shall be my people.” I stood behind the screen, not to interrupt you, and I saw that he woke—you thought him asleep—and he listened. “Thy people shall be my people.”’

And while I spoke I took a withered pansy, folded in paper, from my pocket-book, and held it out to her. On the outside of the paper I had scribbled—it was almost illegible now—‘Pansies,—that’s for thoughts.’

She took it, and handled it curiously, without speaking.

‘I bought that the day of your dinner-party on Saint Andrew’s birthday: do you remember? And it has lain there ever since.’

‘All that time ago?’ she asked, and her voice shook a little when she said it; but she kept her eyes away from mine that sought them. I stooped to reclaim the withered, brittle pansy that even her gentle touch was breaking into powder.

‘May I speak to you now?’ I said.

‘Oh, give me time!’ she cried, in a tone of pain.

Time?—The words pained me. Was she callous? No, Pansy was not callous. I looked into her uplifted, beseeching gaze. I looked into it as into a gulf within the depths of which I was to read my doom,

once for all, of death or life, of hell or heaven. But I could not read its secret. I was desperate now.

'Pansy,' I said, in a voice that sounded to myself like a hoarse whisper, imperative, helpless. 'Pansy, tell me—will you *ever* love me? Oh Pansy, I have loved you, as only God Himself knows, in patience, in silence, so long! I have lived for you: I would die to give you peace—rest—and now? Oh yes, I can wait—I can wait: I will give you time; but let me have one word,—only one word, to live for. I cannot wait longer for *that*.'

She looked in my eyes. She too was reading.

'You—*love* me?' she at last whispered, as if to herself. Her hand was still in mine. It was the one hold I had till then of all that was worth life to me. In the moments of silence that followed we were each of us trying to read the dread decree of destiny for us both. The patience of years made me desperate.

'Pansy!' I said, 'speak now! Break the cruel silence! Let us have one moment

of natural joy. Oh then—*then* I can wait: I will wait. Together we will keep the lamp burning at the dear sacred shrine. Don't be afraid of me, my little all-suffering, unmated dove! I have loved you so long, Pansy, I think you know it,—that you are mine, through all our long happy years that are to be? Speak!'

Pansy raised her head, and looked from the shrouded, covered room, with all its silent reminders of the long past, towards the open window. The afternoon sunset was turning everything to glory, bathing the dusty grass and the trees opposite in floods of yellow light, catching a window in the far distance and making it flash like fire through the trees, and mellowing all Our Town into momentary radiance.

Then Pansy turned her face to me, and upon it was such a joy as I had never seen,—a divine contentment, as if all the happiness denied to her had entered into her soul.

For one more moment I seemed to be staggering out of darkness into light. She came closer to me and gave me both her

hands; and simply, trustfully, like a little child, yet with an infinite tenderness as of a very woman, who knew and understood the joy she was bestowing, the sorrow she was casting for ever away, she told me that my waiting was over.

The sun had set when we parted that evening. On the morrow we were to tell Saint Andrew, to tell him and try and make him understand. Gently—oh, so gently. It should not add one beat to the frail pulse. But he must know: he would live longer: he would rejoice in our joy, and bless us with his dear old tremulous hands on our heads.

I will go to Pansy now, and take her to him in the drawing-room, where he is lying on a couch in the sunshine at the open window, among his books and his flowers, with his dim blue eyes resting lovingly on the stones of Our Town.



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